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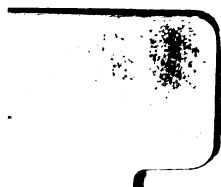
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GUARDIAN.



MRS H. LOVETT CAMERON.

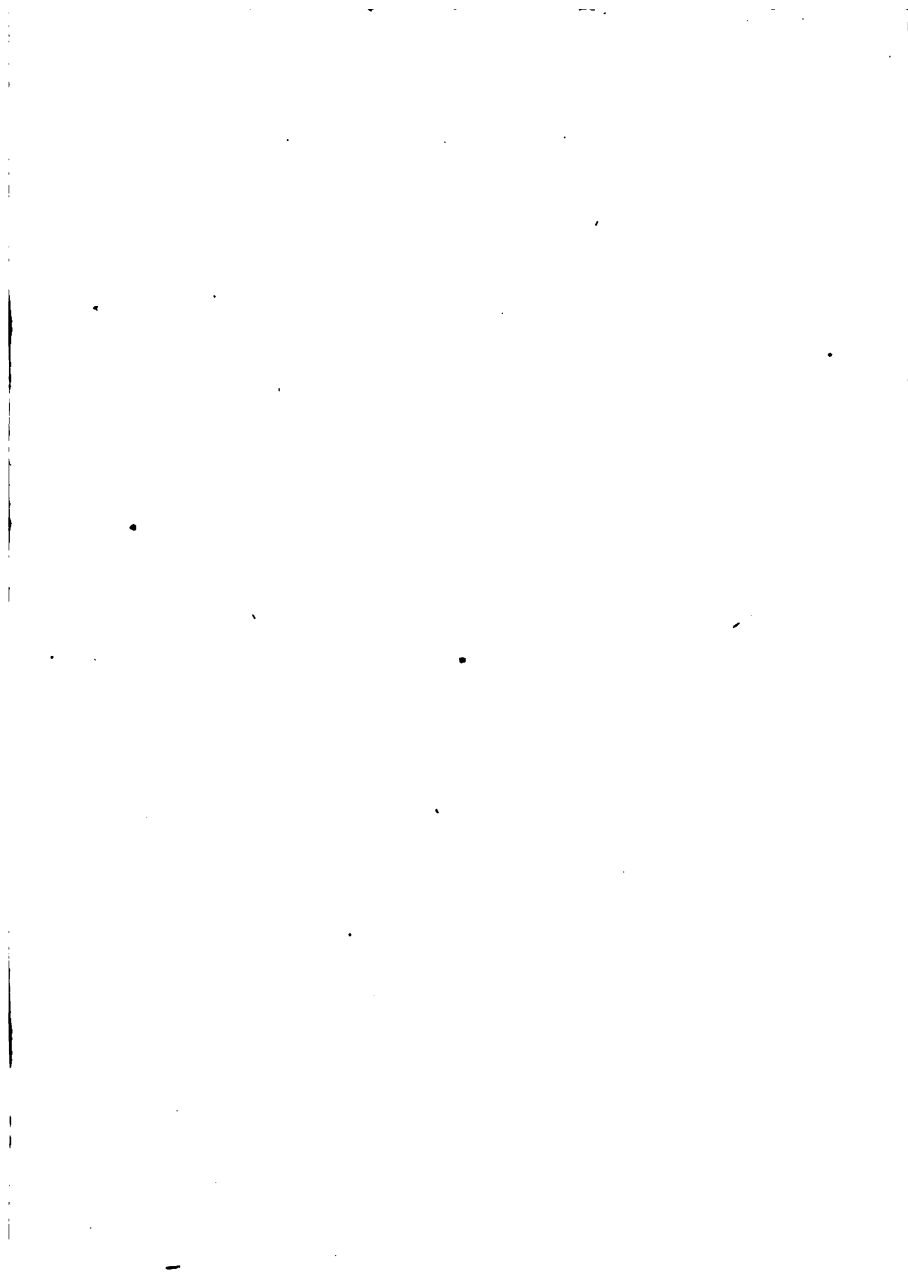


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# JULIET'S GUARDIAN

VOL. I.



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# JULIET'S GUARDIAN

*A NOVEL*

BY

MRS H. LOVETT CAMERON



*IN THREE VOLUMES—VOL. I.*

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# JULIET'S GUARDIAN.

## CHAPTER I.

### SOTHERNE COURT.

A fair flat valley wherein a river winds and winds like a streak of light ; low rounded hills, purple with evening shadows, melting away into a yellow sky ; russet woods, wide meadows, cows waiting at the farm gates, waggons jogging wearily homeward through the lanes, and over it all the golden hazy glow of an autumn sunset.

This is what Sotherne Court—red-gabled and many windowed, standing aloft on the

slope of the hills—looks down upon, whilst Juliet Blair, fair queen of the old house and of the many rich acres on every side of it, sits alone under the sycamore tree on the lawn.

She had thrown off her hat, and the slanting sunlight flickered through the drooping branches over the small dark head, and among the draperies of her dress. Here and there a yellow leaf had fluttered down upon her from the tree above. A little shower of rose leaves lay at her feet, and a sleepy bumble-bee kept on buzzing backwards and forwards in front of her.

She had neither work nor book, her slight hands were clasped together idly upon her knee, and her face was turned towards the fast sinking sun across the valley below.

It needed not the warm glow of the sunshine to set that face alight.

The small mobile features, the rich curves of the sensitive mouth, the dark passionate eyes inherited from the young Spanish mother who has lain for years in the church yard below, all speak of an ardent and impulsive nature; a nature that is intense in its capabilities of loving and suffering, yet with that strange mixture of weakness and recklessness, that is so often the fatal curse of an impetuous character.

Miss Blair of Sotherne Court is by no means an unimportant personage in her native county. For years she had been the idol of a doting father who, after the death of his young wife in the first year of their marriage, had centered every hope and thought in the child whose birth had cost its mother her life.

Miss Blair—she had never even in her baby days been called anything else—was in



her father's eyes a person of the greatest importance; everything was done with a view to her comfort and in accordance with her wishes. From the time when she could speak her own mind—and it was pretty early in life that she learnt to do so—Mr. Blair would never so much as cut down a tree on the estate without consulting his little daughter. And even when, with that fatality which seems sometimes to take possession of old gentlemen, he suddenly brought home a second wife when he was nearly sixty—a person most unsuited to him in every way—he lost no time in making Mrs. Blair number two understand that she was to be but nominal mistress in the house that was eventually to belong to his young daughter.

Mrs. Blair sat for two years at the head of her husband's table, and then the old man died, and the day after the funeral Juliet, who

at seventeen was fully conscious of her new dignities, sailed up to the post of honour at the dinner table, and motioned to her step-mother to take the place at the side which she had hitherto occupied herself; a position which Mrs. Blair was far too wise a woman to dispute.

For Juliet was now mistress where she had been but daughter. The house and all the broad lands were hers, and the widow was left with only a modest jointure, to which Juliet at once, in accordance with her father's wishes, added the request that she would make her home at Sotherne Court as long as it should suit them both to live together.

Mrs. Blair accepted the offer, as she herself would have said, 'in a right spirit.' People said it was an unjust will and hard upon her; but, if she thought so herself, she never said so, nor gave Juliet for a moment

to understand that she was otherwise than perfectly satisfied with the arrangement.

A guardian and trustee had been appointed to the young heiress ; a certain Colonel Fleming, the son of an old college friend of Mr. Blair's, who held a military appointment at Bombay, where he had been for many years. When Mr. Blair died it was not considered necessary for Colonel Fleming to come home. A great many letters passed between him and Mr. Bruce, the family solicitor ; sundry papers and documents were sent out to him, which he duly signed and returned ; and he wrote two letters to his young ward, whom he had not seen since she was five years old.

The first was a gravely kind note, condoling with her in a few well-chosen words on the loss of her father ; the second, dated a few weeks later, equally kind but less grave,

spoke of the new relations of guardian and ward in which they stood to each other. He would always, he said, devote himself to her interests, and do his best to look after her property and her money, although she could not at present trust to a better man than Mr. Bruce, who, from having been in her father's confidence for so many years, was far more competent to advise her than he himself could possibly be. As to herself, he wrote, he did not think he should trouble her with much supervision. She probably had found in her stepmother all the guidance and direction she could possibly require; and, in fact, the only duty connected with herself that he would be called upon to perform, would be the very pleasant one, of some day giving his consent to the fortunate man whom she would honour with her affections; it being expressly stated in her

father's will that she was not to marry without his approval.

After that, Juliet heard nothing more of her guardian for several years, and privately hoped she might not in any way be troubled with him. But when she was twenty-one there were sundry alterations in rents, and transfers of leases, an accumulation of voluminous accounts, and so much business of different kinds to be gone through, that Mr. Bruce deemed it advisable to have the advice and presence of Miss Blair's guardian. He therefore wrote to Bombay and urged him to come home.

Colonel Fleming thought Miss Blair and the Sotherne estates an intolerable nuisance. He had lived in India for so many years that he had lost his interest in England, and he had no particular desire to come home. It had always been a puzzle to him why Mr. Blair,

who had been very kind to him many years ago, when he was quite a young fellow just joining his regiment, should have chosen him, of all people, to be his daughter's guardian. As long as it entailed no trouble he did not so much object to it; but, when it came to going home to look after all these things which he hardly understood—why, it was a nuisance, no doubt.

Still, if Mr. Bruce considered it essential, of course it must be done.

Mr. Bruce did consider it essential, and Colonel Fleming came home.

Colonel Fleming has now been at Sotherne Court a week, and for several hours in the day he and Mr. Bruce, who is also staying in the house, are closeted together over the accounts; after which the keeper is sent in with Miss Blair's compliments to ask whether they would like to

shoot, and the two gentlemen go off together after the pheasants.

Perhaps it is the good shooting, or the quiet and peace of the country, or the luxurious ease of the comfortable old house, or perhaps it is all these things together and something more ; but Colonel Fleming is inexpressibly charmed and soothed by the life at Sotherne Court, and he begins to hope these accounts and papers which he dreaded so much at first may last for many days longer. Juliet, from her seat under the sycamore, catches sight of the sportsmen as they come wandering homewards : she puts on her hat and goes to meet them coming up the hill.

The keeper with the heavily laden game-bag, the two spaniels, the gentlemen in their rough shooting-suits and gaiters, and the girl coming brightly out to meet them ; what a

familiar home picture it all is in an English landscape !

Hugh Fleming thinks he never saw a sweeter type of womanhood than this girl who is his ward, and yet almost a stranger to him. Juliet wears a simple, but perfectly fitting cambric dress, a white shady straw hat over her eyes, and a knot of scarlet geraniums in the front of her dress ; she comes towards him with a little timid smile that somehow cannot be usual to the imperious Miss Blair.

In after years, he often thought of her as he saw her that evening.

‘ Have you had good sport ? ’

She looked at her guardian, but little Mr. Bruce, fat and fussy, with his face very red from his walk, and his hat pushed far off his bald head, answered her.

‘ Capital, my dear, capital. Bigley wood



is as good covert as ever ; and I can tell you, Miss Blair, you have got a guardian who is a first-rate shot !’

‘I am afraid I am wasting my time dreadfully, Juliet,’ says Colonel Fleming, turning to his ward. He called her Juliet from the first in his letters, and he cannot drop it now. ‘I have done no work to-day to speak of.’

‘The more time you waste at Sotherne the better I shall be pleased, Colonel Fleming,’ answers Juliet with her little gracious hostess manner. ‘Besides, in such lovely weather it would be a sin to be indoors. We shall not get many more such summer days in October.’

‘No, indeed ;’ and then they saunter homewards together, the two men one on each side of her.

Mr. Bruce begins chattering about the

people at the farm—Joe Biggs, who has set up a public in the village ; Mary Hale, who wants to be infant schoolmistress ; and a hundred other little local topics which he and Juliet have had in common for years, and which Miss Blair as Lady Bountiful of the parish is bound to be consulted about.

And Colonel Fleming walks on beside her in silence. He is a tall slight man with a soldierly upright figure that makes him look younger than he is ; there are deep lines scored upon his face, and silver streaks in his dark hair and moustache ; and he is tanned, and bronzed, and weather-beaten by the Eastern skies. He is by no means a handsome man, and yet the strongly marked features have a charm of their own that almost gives the effect of beauty.

Juliet keeps covertly glancing up at him from beneath her dark lashes, but, if he sees

her, he does not seem to do so ; his eyes are fixed on the house in front of them.

Juliet, imperious little queen, accustomed to have everything her own way, and tired, perhaps, of good Mr. Bruce and his voluble stories, gets impatient.

‘ You are very silent, my guardian ; what are you thinking of ? ’

‘ Of you, my ward,’ answers Hugh, turning to her with one of those sudden smiles that are so fascinating on a grave, stern face.

‘ Of me ! ’ she cries, flushing up with pleasure.

‘ Yes, of you, Juliet, as you were years ago when I was last at Sotherne, a little dancing, bright-eyed child, clinging on to your father’s hand ; an impetuous, self-willed little monkey you were, I remember. I was wondering if you were much altered now—

now that I find you a tall, stately young woman with ever so many lovers.'

'You will find me pretty self-willed still, especially about the lovers!' said Juliet, laughing.

'Ah! I have no doubt.'

And Juliet blushes rather prettily; she could hardly have told why.

And so they come to the house.

'How is your stepmother's headache?' asks Colonel Fleming, as he makes way for Juliet at the doorway.

'Oh, she won't appear again to-day,' answers the girl carelessly.

'She seems a great invalid.'

'Oh, dreadful!' says Juliet, with a little sneer that her guardian thinks unbecoming. When he knows her a little better, he thinks he will speak to her seriously about her manner to her stepmother; it is never

deferential, and hardly kind; it is, he thinks, the one flaw in the sweet womanliness of her character.

Mrs. Blair does not appear at dinner-time, so the three dine and spend the evening alone; a quiet, peaceful evening. Old Mr. Bruce gets drowsy after the good cookery and the excellent wine, and doses in his arm-chair; Juliet, at her piano, crones over all sorts of dreamy old songs to herself one after the other; and Colonel Fleming sits bolt upright under the reading lamp at the centre table with a volume of Napier's 'Peninsular War' in his hand.

It is a book he professes to admire immensely; but, if anyone had taken the trouble to watch him narrowly this evening, it might have been seen that during a whole hour he has turned over only one page, and

that his eyes are fixed over the top of the book on to the fire beyond.

Now and then, as some familiar old strain comes from the singer behind him. a sort of spasm of pain fleets rapidly across his stern features ; but for that, you might imagine his thoughts to be far away.

When thou art near me sorrow seems to fly ;  
And then I feel, as well I may,  
That on this earth there dwells no one so blest as I !  
But, when thou leav'st me, doubts and fears arise,  
And darkness comes where all before was light.  
The sunshine of my life is in those eyes,  
And, when they leave me, all within is night —

sings Juliet, with her rich contralto voice, trembling with a tenderness and passion of which she herself is hardly conscious.

‘ Sing that again,’ says Colonel Fleming, as the last notes died away.

‘ Do you like it ? I did not know you were listening : it is one of my pets.’

And once more the sweet old song rings through the silent room.

But she is conscious of an audience this time, and does not sing it quite so well.

He does not interrupt her again.

Old days, old scenes, conjured up by the quaintly sweet song, are coursing rapidly through his brain. He sees once more through the mist of years a rose-covered cottage near a wood, an open window, himself a happy, penniless lieutenant, leaning outside against the window sash, listening to a sweet voice that sings over again,

The sunshine of my life is in those eyes,  
And, when they leave me, all within is night.

And then from the gloom she comes towards him, this girl with the blonde head and the blue eyes; she stretches out her hands to him for one moment—one moment, and she is gone: and he sees only a face; the same

face, but cold, and white, and impassive, as he saw her last—ah! God, in her coffin!

‘Oh! my darling, my lost darling,’ he murmurs below his breath.

And meanwhile Juliet at the piano is singing a joyful song about hope, and new life, and love that never dies.

She is nothing to him, this dark-eyed girl with her passionate voice; it is but a fictitious tie that has bound them together. He knows her not; she has no part in his life or his past; she does not even remind him in the faintest degree of that other who has gone, and whose memory is dearer to him than the sight of all other women; and yet there is a something in this imperious girl who is haughty to all others, and who yet can be humble with him; who is a queen,



and yet a child, that attracts him wonderfully.

Colonel Fleming throws Napier's 'Peninsular War' impatiently aside, and walks across the room to the back of her chair.

'You have given me a great deal of pleasure by your singing, Juliet; a great deal of pleasure, and a great deal of pain.'

'Pain?' she asks, looking at him enquiringly; 'I am sorry for that; but if the pleasure has been greater than the pain—?'

'I don't say that: the pleasure was pain. The two are often so mixed up as to be indistinguishable. You are perhaps too young to know this.'

'No, indeed, I understand you perfectly. Was it my singing that pained you?'

'It recalled the past,' he answered, almost sternly.

She looked at him a little curiously. What was his past? she wondered.

‘ It is that old song; I am very sorry; I will never sing it again.’ ,

‘ Don’t say that, my dear child. I told you the pain was pleasant; and I daresay I shall often ask you for it.’ He laid his hand lightly on hers as he spoke, in a manner that was almost fatherly. Juliet hardly seemed to appreciate it; she rose and began putting away her music.

‘ If you will excuse me for saying so, I cannot help thinking that there is something morbid and unreal in trying to foster and cherish the memory of any sorrow that is long ago gone by. Is it not a proof that the trouble is a trouble no longer if we have to make a perpetual effort of conscience to keep it alive?’

She could not tell what made her say

this, not kindly nor gently, but rather bitterly and hardly. Colonel Fleming looked at her for an instant in astonishment, and then said somewhat coldly,

‘If you were older you would perhaps understand better how some things in one’s life are so part of oneself, that no effort is required either to forget or to remember them. I trust, my dear Juliet, that you may never find out this by experience.’

And then he turned away and took up his ‘Peninsular War’ again.

But afterwards, in the night, he lay awake long and thought much of her words. They had cut him like a knife when she had spoken them, but after all was she not perhaps right?

Was the memory of that dead girl indeed a living sorrow to him, or had the sorrowing for her become a habit, or almost, as Juliet

had said, an effort of conscience? Colonel Fleming found that he could give no satisfactory answer to these questions.

Meanwhile Juliet had gone to bed in a great fit of indignation against herself. Why had she spoken so to him? Why had she shocked and startled him with her unkind and heartless words? What had possessed her?

She could not say. Only she knew that she felt a blind, unreasoning hatred against that 'past' of which he had spoken so regretfully and yet so tenderly—a woman, of course! What past can a man have in a woman's eyes that is not connected with her own sex?

But how foolish of her to imagine that her guardian Colonel Fleming, old enough nearly to be her father, had had no such past, no woman to love or to deceive him in all the years he had lived!

And after all what could it matter to her—Juliet Blair—whether this were so or no? She asked herself this last question several times over, and ended by answering it to herself very definitely before she went to sleep. Decidedly no; it did not matter to her in the least!

## CHAPTER II.

## MRS. BLAIE'S FIRST MOVE.

THE following morning found Colonel Fleming to all appearance hard at work in the library. The table was covered with papers and books; big parchment deeds, account books of all sizes and kinds, letters, and note books full of pencil memoranda; and in front of them all sat Miss Blair's guardian, with his forehead leaning on one hand and a pen in the other.

Mr. Bruce had set him his task, and left him, if the truth must be told, to slink away and read the morning papers.

'It is quite necessary that you should

understand the nature of all these things, my dear Sir,' he had said ; ' if you will kindly read these deeds very carefully through and go over the Holmby farm accounts, I will look in upon you by-and-by and see how you are getting on. I should only bewilder you if I were to stay with you now, and it is perfectly simple, my dear Sir, perfectly simple, I assure you.' And with that Mr. Bruce had retired to the breakfast room with the 'Times' under his arm, chuckling inwardly at the prospect of a good hour's quiet read before he need in any way disturb the labours of the much bewildered Colonel.

The library windows opened on to the rose garden, and there among the late autumn roses, with a basket and a pair of big scissors, wandered Juliet, cutting a few flowers and clipping off a dead leaf, or a drooping branch

here and there ; not doing much good thereby, and considerably disturbing the peace of mind of the head gardener, who hovered about in the distance eyeing her suspiciously.

It was just that sort of amateur gardening which ladies delight in, which gives them no trouble and no fatigue, and yet makes them imagine that they take the liveliest interest in their flower garden.

A pretty graceful figure in perpetual motion, passing and repassing continually before the library windows ;—what a fatal distraction for a man with sheets of dry accounts spread out before him, for which the beauty of the morning alone made him feel sufficiently disinclined !

To do Miss Blair justice, she was quite unconscious of being watched. The writing table in the library was not close to the windows, and there were muslin draperies



in front of them which made it difficult to see plainly into the room from the sunshine outside, even if it had occurred to her to look that way, which it did not.

Juliet moreover was the last woman in the world to attitudinise with a view to producing an effect on any man. She was not specially vain—very handsome women seldom are; they leave that weakness to their less favoured sisters. It is the moderately pretty, the pink and white doll faces, that oftenest are inordinately vain. Not being so sure of their looks, they are more anxious about them, and consequently more self-conscious, than those whose beauty is an undoubted fact that none can deny.

Juliet knew that she was handsome, but I doubt if she often thought about it. It was not as a beauty that she estimated herself. She had plenty of self-esteem, but it

was as Miss Blair, the owner of Sotherne, whose position gave her a right to a voice in everything that concerned her native county, who indeed had a right to a vote—she often said indignantly—as much right as Squire Travers and Sir George Ellison, her neighbours on either side! If Juliet valued herself, it was in this light, and not at all on account of her beauty.

That she was beautiful she was of course aware. Her mother had been beautiful, her father was a singularly handsome man, it would have been strange indeed if she had not inherited their good looks. Besides, the Blairs had always been a handsome race; they thought nothing of it. It was an advantage of course; but it was a matter quite of secondary importance to the owners of Sotherne.

Moreover, Juliet was singularly simple-

mind. She flitted about among her roses because she wanted some flowers for her drawing-room, and enjoyed cutting them herself, without a passing thought of what sort of a picture it was she made, as she moved to and fro before the windows.

Meanwhile Colonel Fleming was looking at her intently. How graceful she was! How beautiful! And what a fine character was traced on that open fearless face! How wonderfully she interested him! Was it not certainly his duty as her guardian to study her character and learn to understand and know her thoroughly? Of course she was nothing to him personally, a mere child, albeit a most charming one. She had not the sweet gentleness of that other woman who was the love of his life, and who was dead; but after all that did not matter to him, for of course she was nothing, never

could be anything to him of that kind: all that sort of thing was over and done with for him for ever. He was her guardian; simply and solely her guardian, and she his ward, his child almost. And surely it was most proper and most right that he should try and win her affection and confidence, in order that he might obtain that influence over her which her poor father would certainly have wished him to exercise.

Just at this point of his reflections there came shambling across the lawn towards Miss Blair a tall, loosely built young fellow about three and twenty. He had fair, straight hair, and blue eyes, in one of which was stuck an eyeglass, and a pale but not bad-looking face, with fairly good features set in a little straw-coloured frame of young whiskers.

He came and stood behind Juliet as she

bent over her rose bushes, looking very nervous and shy, and didn't seem to know quite what to do with his arms and legs.

'Hallo, Cis,' she said, turning round suddenly upon him; 'I didn't see you. How are you?' And she put out two fingers to him.

Cecil Travers took the fingers, pressed them adoringly between both his hands, and bent over them in speechless worship.

'Home for your holidays, Cis?' said Juliet, unconcernedly snipping off a rose with her disengaged hand and not looking at him as she spoke.

'Holidays! You mean vacations,' answered the youth rather indignantly; 'why, what are you thinking of, Juliet! Don't you know that I have left Oxford for good now? I have been in Scotland shooting lately,' he added rather grandly.

‘ Oh, ah! yes, I forgot,’ said Juliet, coolly going on with her snipping and clipping.

He stood by her for a minute or two in silence, watching her.

‘ Have you nothing to say to me at all, Juliet? Here have I been away two months, and I thought you would be glad to see me back, and you don’t speak to me, you don’t even look at me!’

‘ I am very sorry, Cis; I am sure I don’t mean to be unkind to you; what shall I say to you? I hope you have enjoyed yourself—how is your father? and have you brought any message from Georgie? and—why, Cis!’ turning upon him and looking at him for the first time full in the face, ‘ why, *how* your whiskers have grown!’

Now, if there is anything a young man of three-and-twenty who has left college and

considers himself in every way a man, hates, loathes, and detests, it is to have remarks made upon his improved looks, height, or hirsute adornments, especially when, as in this case, the remark is made laughingly by the object of his affections, whom he worships and adores, and to whom he has been in the habit of writing the most passionate and despairing love sonnets, sitting up late every night composing them for the last two years, and then burning them in the candle before getting into bed.

Juliet, fair object of all my hopes and fears,  
For whom I nightly shed these bitter tears,  
Low bowed beneath thy feet I lie,  
Smile once upon me, or I die—

ran the last of these productions. Luckily, Juliet had never seen any of them, or how she would have laughed !

And now this divinity for whom he said

he shed tears nightly, and under whose feet he was supposed to be stretched at full length occasionally, looked at him with those great deep eyes of hers which in another epic poem he had compared to the stars of heaven, and told him deliberately that his whiskers had grown !

‘ If you can’t find anything better than that to say, I’d better go,’ he said, turning away with a very red face.

‘ My dear Cis, don’t be so silly ;’ and she held out her hand to him, which, of course, he seized upon, and came back close to her at once.

‘ If you won’t stare at me in that lack-a-daisical way, I shall have plenty to say to you, and of course I am delighted to see you back. Here ! Hold my basket for me, and then I can go on with my roses and talk at the same time. Now, let me see ; what news



have I? Oh, you know my guardian is here.'

'So I heard. What a nuisance!' said Cis, quite restored to felicity and following her about with the basket in both hands.

'Not at all,' said Miss Blair, with dignity; 'I like Colonel Fleming very much.'

'You didn't think you would before he came, and I suppose he is a stupid, dried up old fogey.'

'Nothing of the sort,' answered Juliet sharply, with an indignant flush on her face—she could hardly have told why. 'Colonel Fleming is a most charming man, and I won't hear him spoken of disrespectfully; and Cis, if you can find nothing to say but what is rude and disagreeable—Here! Give me the basket.'

'Oh, Juliet, Juliet, don't be angry with me; don't take the basket away; I'll say

---

anything you like'—and between them the basket rolled to the ground, spreading the roses about on the lawn. Cis took the opportunity of catching hold of Juliet's hand and pressing it eagerly, whilst she burst out laughing at his agitated and piteous countenance.

And Colonel Fleming inside the library leant both elbows on the table and looked on frowning. 'Confound that impudent puppy!' he muttered. He could not hear their voices, but the acting of the little scene was pretty plain to him.

The young fellow's adoring looks, the way he bent over her hand, the half quarrel, the reconciliation, and then the scuffle over the basket, and Juliet's merry laughter—it was all such a natural little love scene to be enacted between two young people on a sunny morning among the rose bushes.

‘ Ah, I see you are looking at them. Don’t they make a pretty picture together ? ’ said a soft suave voice behind his chair.

Colonel Fleming jumped up hurriedly. Behind him stood a lady in the most becoming of lilac cashmere morning gowns, softened by rich Valenciennes lace at the throat and wrists. She leant one elbow on the top of his arm-chair and held up a gold eyeglass through which she looked admiringly at the young people outside in the garden.

She might have been eight or nine and thirty, and had evidently been, indeed she still was, a very pretty woman. Her hair, fair and soft, if a little thin, was billowed up into numberless curls and puffs above her smooth white forehead, and surmounted by the tiniest and daintiest Valenciennes lace cap. Her complexion was of that inde-

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scribably delicate transparency which suggests irresistibly the presence of rose powder and veloutine ; her eyes, blue and large, although a little cold and hard, were traced round their lids with a dark line which surely nature alone could never have drawn there ; and her lips were of that brilliant coral hue which no young blood of twenty ever gave ; in a word, we all know the sort of woman—a beautiful make-up—the details were revolting, but the whole effect was enchanting.

‘ Such a pretty picture ! ’ said this lady, again referring to the couple in the garden, who by this time had moved off nearly out of sight.

‘ Mrs. Blair ! good morning. I hope your headache is better to-day,’ said Colonel Fleming, as he jumped up with a start that was almost guilty.

‘ A little better, thanks,’ she answered

with a resigned sigh, sinking down into a low arm-chair. 'I am a sad sufferer, you know; the circumstances of my life have quite shattered my health—quite shattered!' she repeated, with a wan, melancholy smile.

'Indeed, I am very sorry you have such bad health,' answered he, not knowing quite what form of sympathy was expected of him.

'However—ah, well! I don't wish to speak of myself, Colonel Fleming; I never think of myself, as you well know. It was of that dear child we were speaking—*our* child, I might almost call her, might I not?' and here Mrs. Blair looked up at him with a smile that was almost seraphic.

The Colonel bowed stiffly. It was but a few minutes ago that in his own thoughts he had called Juliet his child, and felt quite

fatherly towards her ; but that was before the appearance of that love-sick looking youth ; and, moreover, the notion of a joint property in her with Mrs. Blair was not altogether agreeable to him.

‘ You see how it all is with our dear child, don’t you, Colonel Fleming?’ continued Mrs. Blair.

‘ Indeed ! I hardly know what you refer to.’

‘ Aha ! sly man !’ said the lady, tapping him sportively with her fan. ‘ Ah, you gentlemen always pretend to be so impassive in matters of love. Now love is my atmosphere, my life ! I worship a love affair. To see two young hearts drawn together in pure confiding affection, is a sight to make angels weep with joy !’ and here Mrs. Blair, to show her sympathy with the angels, applied the corner of her lace pocket-hand-

kerchief to her eyes, looking furtively at it afterwards to make sure that she had not rubbed off any of the bismuth.

Colonel Fleming pushed his hand into his trousers' pockets, stared at his own feet, lifted his eyebrows, and said, 'Ah, yes, very true!' with the air of one who expects shortly to be hung, after the manner of men in such embarrassing circumstances.

'So *sure* you would agree with me,' murmured the widow with a sigh. 'You will feel, I am sure, what a comfort it must be to me to see everything going on so well with my darling Juliet and dear Cecil Travers—so suitable in every way; in position, in fortune, in mind, and in age. Don't you think it a great thing for people to be well matched in age, Colonel Fleming?' and here she glanced up at him with a little cunning look in her cold blue eyes.

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‘Certainly, Mrs. Blair! but you, yourself——’

‘Ah, don’t speak of my unhappy life! pray spare me allusions to my widowed state. It is because, alas! I felt the discrepancy myself; because, because ——’ here a gentle fit of sobs interrupted her, and she retired again behind her handkerchief.

‘My dear Mrs. Blair!’ remonstrated Hugh Fleming, feeling more and more ill at ease. ‘I am sure I am quite distressed to have recalled anything painful; pray, forgive me.’

‘Say no more, dear friend,’ said the lady, holding out a white hand towards him which common politeness forced him to hold for a moment in his own. ‘Say no more; I know your good heart, I can appreciate the delicacy of your sentiments; but to return to our beloved girl. Is it not a comfort to think



that a husband is already found for her, one who is so suitable to her, so desirable in every way, and so devoted to her, so *devoted* to her ?'

'Am I to understand, Mrs. Blair, that your stepdaughter is engaged to this Mr.—Mr. Travers ?' said Colonel Fleming, with a cold stiffness which he in vain attempted to conceal.

Again Mrs. Blair looked up at him with a quick sly glance of curiosity.

'Well, not engaged exactly,' she resumed, looking down again and smoothing out the soft folds of her dress. 'I suppose to say *engaged* would perhaps be rather premature ; but the dear children understand each other thoroughly. Cecil is most eager, dear fellow, but Juliet is a little coy and uncertain as yet. Of course girls are always timid in such cases, as I was myself,

I well remember!' with a little sigh over the recollection.

'Ah, then Juliet is not quite so *devoted* as the young man!' said Hugh, with a little smile.

'Now, now, Colonel, you mustn't be hard on the dear child! no lack of tenderness and heart *there*, I can assure you! But girls ought to hang back a little, and it has been so long planned and arranged for her—her dear father was so anxious and settled it all long ago with old Mr. Travers—and he spoke of it on his death-bed, he did indeed, almost with his dying breath; and the properties adjoining and all make it so very important—and Mr. Bruce and I of course have always felt it our duty to place it before her, and we do *hope* Colonel Fleming that we may count upon your support and influence in this matter, as you know she must have your

consent before she marries. I do hope you will not let any little dislike you may feel to the scheme stand in the way of her dear father's last wishes.'

'I, my dear madam! what can you be thinking of? I have no dislike whatever to any scheme for Miss Blair's happiness; my only wish is to do what is best and most desirable for her; what other object could I possibly have?'

'Thanks, thanks, dear friend!' murmured Mrs. Blair, again putting forth her hand, which Colonel Fleming was again obliged to take; it was a very pretty hand as he could not help noticing as he bowed over it. Poor woman, she seemed very devoted to Juliet's interests, and if she was a little affected and gushing, why, was it not a sweet feminine failing? And then she was a pretty woman still, in spite of the pearl

powder and rouge, a very pretty woman ; a graceful figure, too, he further reflected. And so he did not feel very hard-hearted towards her although she had managed to worry him considerably about Juliet. After all, said Hugh Fleming to himself impatiently, what did it matter to him, as long as the boy was steady, and fond of her, and a suitable match, as no doubt he was? That was all he, Colonel Fleming, had to do with it. She might possibly be worthy of better things, but then women are always fond of throwing themselves away. Nine out of ten clever women are fools in that one matter alone, the matter of the men they marry. If Juliet had set her heart on this lanky youth, and her father had wished it, and her stepmother and Mr. Bruce also were in favour of it—why, there seemed nothing more left for him to do but to set the bells

a ringing and to give her away with a smiling face. And then one comfort of it would be that his guardianship would be over, and he would go back again to India, and wash his hands of the whole business for ever. Yes, it was much the best thing for everybody concerned and would simplify matters very much for himself.

And then he roused himself with a half impatient sigh to listen to Mrs. Blair, who was still going over the many advantages of the match.

‘He has known her all her life, you know, and so thoroughly understands and appreciates the dear girl ; and being the only son, of course he comes into whatever money there will be as well as the property. The daughters have their mother’s fortune. Nice clever girls the Miss Travers are, and so fond of darling Juliet—they make quite a sister of

her already ; indeed the whole family are ready to welcome her with open arms. I am so glad to have had this talk with you, Colonel Fleming, and to have secured your sympathy in the matter. I felt so *sure* that your admirable good sense would make you take the same view of the subject that I do ; though I fear you don't care so much for the *sentiment* of love as I do, you naughty, heartless, matter-of-fact man !' and here Mrs. Blair again brought her fan playfully into action.

'I certainly am not given much to thinking about love affairs, if that is what you mean, Mrs. Blair,' said Colonel Fleming good-temperedly. 'The position of a father to a full-grown young woman is a new one to me.'

'Ah, yes ; and you so *thoroughly* put yourself into the place of her dear father,

don't you, Colonel Fleming? So *nice* of you!' and again went that covert glance up at him from those sharp-looking eyes. *This* time Colonel Fleming caught the look, and it set him thinking.

Had this pretty *passée* beauty, with her silly gushing affection and her civil speeches to himself, any double meaning in all that she was saying? Was she cloaking a secret enmity under the guise of friendship and frankness? or, gracious heavens! had she read him better even than he could read himself?

And through all the tanned bronze of his weather-beaten face Colonel Hugh Fleming turned red at the bare idea of what she might have seen, or might have fancied that she had seen of his innermost thoughts.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE TRAVERS FAMILY.

RATHER more than three miles distant from Sotherne Court stands Bradley House, the residence of Mr., Mrs., Master, and the Misses Travers. It is a long, low, irregular, white building, with no architectural beauty, and in a very dilapidated condition indeed. The mouldy plaster is peeling off the walls in many places, the window-sashes and door-frames have been guiltless of paint for years, the garden is weed-grown and uncared for, and chickens and dogs wander alike unproved over the once trim Italian parterre in front of the drawing-room windows. In a



word, the general appearance of the house is poverty-stricken and neglected. And yet Squire Travers is not at all a poor man ; he has a good moderate fortune derived from a small but compact property, which, if it does not show quite the same high standard of model farming as do the adjoining acres of his wealthier neighbour, Miss Blair, is still fairly cared for and productive. Moreover his wife has a few thousands of her own, quite enough to portion off his unmarried daughters comfortably. There is no reasonable cause why the plaster and paint should be dropping off the outside of the house unheeded and unrepaired, nor why the turkey carpet in the dining-room should be threadbare and the stairs carpetless, nor why the whole of the antiquated mahogany furniture should be dropping to pieces unmended all over the house.

No *reasonable* cause I have said—no; but there was a cause, and many people, including Mrs. Travers herself, and also her son Cecil, and her daughter Mary considered the cause a very unreasonable one indeed.

For Squire Travers kept the hounds, and for a man of small property and moderate means to divert those moneys which should by rights have been spent on the paperer, the painter, the upholsterer, and the cabinet-maker, upon hounds and horses, huntsmen and whip's wages, and compensations to farmers, was felt by sundry members of his family to be a grievance indeed. But old Thomas Travers had kept the hounds for years, as his father had done before him, and he often said he would starve himself and his family on bread and water sooner than give them up.

If you will go round to the stables at the back of the house you will see a very different state of things. There in the red-tiled courtyard, kept as clean and neat as the deck of a yacht, numerous grooms and stable-boys are bustling backwards and forwards in and out of the long rows of stalls and loose boxes which take up two sides of the square ; no lack of paint and plaster there ! The stalls are light and airy, the woodwork is polished till it glitters, the horses are sleek and shiny, and in good condition ; all is life, and brisk business, and order ; and Mr. Davis, the stud groom, swaggers about superintending everything and everybody, with his hands in his trousers' pockets, a straw in his mouth, and a villainous-looking but perfectly bred bulldog at his heels—' for all the world like a dook ! ' as says an admiring under-

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housemaid, who worships him adoringly at a distance.

If I were to take you on to the kennels a mile and a half off you would see the same story ; buildings in first-rate repair with all the most modern improvements carried out to perfection. The stables, the huntsman's house, the kennels themselves, everything in apple-pie order ; and meanwhile the Squire's wife catches her foot in that hole in the carpet every time she goes into her bedroom !

The decorations of the entrance hall indicate sufficiently well the predominating influence in the household. Hunting crops, spurs, bits, fox brushes, heads, and pads, arranged in artistic patterns, literally line the walls, while a glimpse through the open door of the Squire's study reveals the same style of ornament relieved by hunting and sporting

pictures all over the walls of that most cosy-looking apartment—for there is no such room for comfort and ease and luxury in any house, large or small, as the master's 'den.' Here resort all the members of the family when they desire a little peace and enjoyment, when they want to fly from the practising of Maria's scales and Czerny's exercises on the drawing-room piano, or from the squalls and shouts of the children's games along the passages on a wet day, or from the stiff decorum of the lady visitors in the morning room. Here are comfortable chairs on which unreprieved you may repose your feet if you feel so disposed, even if your boots are heavy or bespattered with mud; here you may smoke your pipe or drink your brandy and soda, resting your glass as you do so on the carpet at your feet with no dread of rebuke before your eyes;

here you may snooze away a Sunday afternoon over the last new novel or the 'Sporting Gazette,' perfectly safe from the inroads of the Reverend Snuffles, who, even if he chance to visit the house during the afternoon, is not likely to venture into the inner sanctum and to catch you at it.

Squire Travers' 'study' was a haven of rest after this sort. Many a long hour had he and his eldest daughter, Georgie, spent together in this cosy retreat whilst the other members of the family were employed in other and more homely avocations; the Squire dozing over his pipe, and Georgie writing letters in her father's name to the farmers, or settling in her own mind all about next month's meets, or often merely conning over the ordnance map and going over again in imagination some famous run of last season.

For Georgie Travers was her father's own-daughter. A slight, wiry-looking little creature, with a blonde head and small baby features; she had nevertheless a perfect seat on a horse, a wrist as strong as a man's, and the most indomitable pluck and nerve of any lover of hunting who followed her father's hounds. And keen! Why, there are no words to describe Georgie's keenness in the noble sport. Wind or rain, early or late, nothing stopped her—she was often out and away on winter mornings long before her mother opened her eyes to her wearisome life, or her sister Mary had turned round shivering in her bed to ring for her cup of tea.

Near or far, wet or fine, no meet was ever without Georgie Travers' slight figure, well balanced on her lean thorough-bred chestnut, or on one of her father's big blood-

looking bays, being seen close to the Squire's side when the hounds threw off.

Georgie is her father's secretary and right hand, much to her mother's disapprobation, who thinks her whole conduct unfeminine and indecorous, and often suggests that she should superintend her younger sister's practising.

'Let her alone,' growls the Squire; 'let her alone, ma'am. I want the girl myself;' and so Mrs. Travers is silent, and Georgie takes up her abode in her father's study as a matter of course.

The father and daughter are there now very busy together. The Squire is in top boots and breeches; winter and summer alike, he is always attired in these symbols of his profession, from morning until dinner time, Sundays excepted, when he dons a frock coat and sombre-looking



trousers in which his burly form looks sadly out of place.

He sits leaning upon the table with both arms and dictating to his daughter, who is scribbling away for bare life. Cub-hunting begins next week, ushering in the more solemn rites of November, and pretty well every farmer in the county has to be written to. Georgie has a beagle pup secreted on her lap under the table, which she keeps furtively stroking with her left hand, whilst a superannuated hound, blind with one eye and otherwise considered past his work, and so delivered over unto her as a pet, lies close to her feet on the folds of her dress.

‘ And I propose drawing the Colebrook woods at six o’clock on Monday morning’—reads Georgie aloud after her father’s dictation—‘ and should be glad to know if

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you have many foxes in your own covers,' continues the Squire.

'Why, not one, papa! you know there's not one! I believe that old Briggs has trapped them all the summer,' cries Georgie, excitedly.

'Shouldn't wonder—surly old brute—but we must write civilly all the same; he knows very well what to expect if he has trapped them, that's all! Make haste and sign it; that's the last. Why do you keep that pup on your lap, child? It is covered with fleas—puppies always are. What a girl you are!' adds the father admiringly, as Georgie stands up and hugs the puppy, perfectly regardless of its reputed inhabitants.

'You ought to have been a boy; can't make out why you weren't. Ah, well!' with a half sigh, 'go and find that big milk-sop

brother of yours, my girl; I must give him a dressing now, I suppose !'

Georgie lingers a minute putting away her writing case.

' Don't be hard on poor Cis, papa ; you know he isn't strong.'

' Not strong ? Pooh, fiddlesticks ! What business has a great big fellow six foot high to be ailing like a girl ? I've no patience with such nonsense. D'ye ever hear *me* say I'm not strong ? D'ye ever find *me* not able to be up and after the hounds at six o'clock in the morning ? D'ye ever hear *me* say I've got a headache, or a pain in my chest or my back ? and I'm sixty and your brother's twenty-three ! All d—— nonsense, I say,' said the Squire, working himself into a rage ; ' it's all your mother's molly-coddling has done it, I say ; and a precious muff she's made of him. A son of mine who can't

ride to hounds—ugh!’ and the supreme contempt and disgust expressed in the final ejaculation made Georgie laugh in spite of her sympathy with her brother.

Mr. Travers, like many people blessed themselves with robust health and a strong constitution, regarded delicate people with the utmost contempt. It was almost a sin in his eyes not to be able to walk and ride like an athlete. It was a perpetual sore to him that his only son should be weak and unequal to physical exertion; he could not understand it, nor indeed believe in it at all, and nothing would persuade him that Cecil was not in a great measure shamming.

*He* was never tired, he said; *he* was never ill. If he did feel a little squeamish in the morning, why, a pint of home-brewed ale and a good gallop across the fields put him all straight in half an hour! And then, when

Cecil shook his head and doubted whether such remedies would have the smallest effect in his case, his father lost his temper and turned round and swore at him for a coward and a fool.

Good-hearted little Georgie took her brother's part and tried to shield him from the Squire's wrath; but she was not free herself from a certain amount of pitying contempt, born of a perfectly strong body and a healthy appetite, for the delicate indolence of her brother. Like the Squire, she thought Providence had made a mistake, and that she ought to have been the son and Cis the daughter.

She went away to find her brother, with the puppy still in her arms, and Chanticleer, the one-eyed, toothless old hound, following close at her heels.

‘Cis, papa wants you in the study.’

Master Cis was lying down on the sofa in his mother's morning room, with an open book of Browning's poems on his chest, his eyes closed, and his arms thrown up behind his head. Mrs. Travers, a pale washed-out looking woman in drab, sat hard by, dictating a French story to Flora, aged twelve, whilst through the open door in the adjoining room could be seen the second daughter Mary, who, reclining in an arm-chair with a novel, was supposed to be looking after the four finger exercises of little Amy, the youngest child.

‘ One, two, three, four—time, child ! ’ in Mary's cross, sharp voice.

‘ Ils n'avaient plus—l'espérance—de sauver—les naufragés ’—slowly draws out Mrs. Travers from the table.

‘ Do you think they will be saved ? ’ asks Flora breathlessly, as she writes down

an agonising description of the shipwreck of an unhappy pair of lovers.

‘Not a doubt of it; and they’ll marry and live happy ever after!’ breaks in Cis, reassuringly from the sofa, thereby showing that he has been listening too.

And then comes Georgie with those awful words, ‘Papa wants you in the study, Cis.’

‘Your brother has a headache, Georgie,’ says Mrs. Travers, deprecatingly.

‘Well, it will be much quieter for him there than here with all the lessons going on.’

‘I wish you wouldn’t bring those nasty, dirty dogs here!’ says her mother; but little Flora has slipped down from her chair and thrown both arms round Chanticleer’s neck, and is kissing him rapturously on his blind eye.

‘Flora, you naughty child! come back to your chair this minute. I declare, Georgie, you quite smell of the stables, and I wish you wouldn’t come in here disturbing your sisters at their lessons.’

‘The dogs aren’t a bit dirty, mamma; they are as clean as Christians, and, if I do smell of stables, it’s not at all an unwholesome smell; and I’ve only come to give papa’s message to Cis,’ says Georgie, answering her mother’s complaints categorically, as she does the farmers, in the letters she is accustomed to docket and answer.

‘Come along, Cis, make haste!’

‘My poor boy!’ sighs his mother, looking fondly after him.

‘What’s it about, Georgie; is he angry with me?’

‘Not more than usual,’ she answers laughing, as they go out together; ‘but, if



you would just try and please him sometimes, he would be so much gentler to you. Now, why didn't you go out and see them exercising that new mare this morning, as he asked you to do at breakfast, instead of lounging on the sofa with that trash?' she added, pointing contemptuously to the poetry book.

'Browning is not trash,' said Cis indignantly; 'and what do I care about new mares.'

'Ah, what indeed!' said Georgie, turning off from him with a sigh; and, passing out through the open hall door, she took the slanting path across the paddock that led towards the kennels, with Chanticleer and the 'pup' following boisterously and noisily behind her.

As to Cis, he waited for a moment irresolute outside the study door before he could summon up courage to turn the handle.

He stood very much in awe of his father, and these private conferences in that cosy little room were apt to be of an unpleasant and stormy nature.

The Squire's first words to-day, however, were in an amicable tone of voice.

‘ Well, Cis, my boy, have you been to have a look at that young mare ? ’

And Cis had the presence of mind to answer, ‘ Not yet, sir.’

‘ Ah ! well, didn't suppose you would ; but it isn't of that I wanted to speak ; light your pipe, boy ; ah, no, by the way, you don't smoke ; makes you feel sick, don't it, eh ? ’

This was another sore point with the Squire, that his only son should not be able to smoke a quiet pipe with him ; and he was for ever pretending to forget it in order to remind him of this delinquency and to sneer

at him about it. Cis certainly had something to bear from his father, too ; he got very red and did not answer.

‘ Well, Cis, I want to talk to you about Miss Blair.’

‘ About Miss Blair, sir?’ stammered Cis, getting redder still.

‘ Yes ; you know very well my wishes on that subject ; it’s high time you made the running there, you know. She’s a fine girl, and a good girl, and goes deuced well across country, too—not to be compared to your sister, of course ; but still she goes very straight, very straight indeed, and the property fits in very well ; a fine property and a nice girl—I don’t know what more you want, Cis.’

‘ I assure you, sir, my dearest wish, my greatest joy would be to induce Juliet to be my wife. I love her dearer than I love my life.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’ interrupted the Squire, with the most irreverent guffaw; ‘ha, ha! don’t go rehearsing the proposal to *me*, my dear boy. What’s the good talking of love and sentiment and bosh to me? That’s all humbug. What does all that signify? The girl has got a pot of money and a fine property—you needn’t say any more about it. Go in and win if you can, and make haste about it. I want you to do something to the old place when I’m gone, Cis. I don’t suppose you’ll keep the hounds. Ah, it’s a pity Georgie wasn’t the boy! But if you marry Juliet Blair you’ll live at Sotherne and have a little money to do up the old house for your mother and the girls. It’s a fine match for you, my boy.’

‘I don’t think of that for one moment, sir, I assure you,’ said the boy, rather hotly.

‘Well, then, you should think of it, Cis.

Why, what do you suppose I married your mother for ? ’

‘ Love, sir, I trust,’ answered Cis, gravely and reproachfully.

‘ Not a bit of it. It was for that slip of land that dove-tailed into Cosby farm down on the flat. I’d always coveted that land, and then she had her bit of money besides ; and I don’t say, Cis, that I didn’t like and esteem her, and she’s a very good woman in her way, but I might have liked and esteemed her ever so much, I shouldn’t have married her if it hadn’t been for the land and the money. Lord bless you ! An eldest son *must* think of these things ; there’s no particular virtue in marrying for love ; it’s all the same in a dozen years’ time whatever you’ve married for ; only, when you’ve got a something substantial besides, it makes everything pleasanter for life.’

Cis looked very grave during this philosophical enunciation of his father's views upon marriage in general and his own in particular, and again signified his perfect willingness, nay, eagerness, to marry Miss Blair for herself and her money combined.

'Only,' he added sadly, 'there's one thing against it. I'm afraid she won't have me.'

'And shouldn't be a bit surprised if she wouldn't,' said the old man, veering round unreasonably. 'Why don't you ride, and hunt, and go about like other men, and do something to make a sensible girl proud of you, instead of wasting your life doing nothing?'

'I haven't done badly at college, sir,' remonstrated Cis; 'it isn't my fault I am not strong enough for violent out-door exercise. You forget I took a first in mods.'

‘What’s mods?—a parcel of Latin and Greek and rubbish! I’d rather you’d have broken your collar-bone over a stiff bit of timber! Not strong, indeed! No wonder you’re not strong—always molly-coddling over the fire with a book, and never clearing your brains out with a good gallop across country. I sent you to college to make a man of you, sir, not to learn a pack of Latin and stuff!’

At which novel view of University education Cis raised his eyebrows and laughed.

‘Ah, you may laugh, but you’ll laugh the wrong side of your mouth when you find Miss Blair won’t have you. There’ll be Wattie Ellison and a dozen more after her before you——’

‘Why, Wattie Ellison is Georgie’s lo——’ began Cis.

‘Nothing of the sort,’ thundered the

Squire. 'Don't go coupling your sister's name with an idle young pauper like that, though to be sure he *can* ride a bit. Georgie knows better. But you'll let Juliet Blair slip through your fingers if you're not sharp. Go and propose, boy; don't be a fool. Girls always come round at last if a man keeps on worry, worry, worry at 'em. Turn 'em round; keep their heads straight at the fence; if they refuse the first time, turn 'em round and send 'em at it again,' he added not unkindly.

'I am most anxious to marry her, sir, but she has refused me dozens of times;' and Cis got very red and looked intensely miserable.

His father burst out laughing. 'Ah, she has, has she? Well, I am not surprised; but you were a boy then; now you've come home for good and you're a man—



as much of a man as I suppose you ever will be,' he added, ruefully; 'and I wish you to go as often as you can to Sotherne and do your very best to succeed. Do you understand me, Cis?'

'Certainly, father,' answered the youth with alacrity; and then he went round to his father's chair and laid his hand on his. 'I wish I could ride better, father; perhaps if I marry Juliet you will forgive me that.'

'All right, my boy; we'll square it off so. God bless you; ' and the old man gave the young one a grip of his hard old hand. He was a little touched in spite of himself; and after Cis had left the room he sat still looking after him out of the window, as the boy wandered idly on to the drive in front of the house. 'Well, well, I suppose he and I don't understand each other; he's a well-

intentioned lad too, and Juliet Blair would improve him wonderfully; but he's an awful sawney. Dear, dear, dear! what a pity, what a sad pity Georgie wasn't the boy!'

## CHAPTER IV.

## GEORGIE'S LOVER.

GEORGIE TRAVERS and the dogs were by this time at the kennels. Everybody thought a great deal of Miss Georgie there. The whip touched his greasy old fur cap to her as he ran to open the gate with a grin of pleasure on his weather-stained old face; Ricketts, the huntsman, came forward respectfully to know what he could do for her, and called out her favourite hounds to be stroked and caressed; and then of course she must go into the stables. There were a few young horses always kept up at the kennels in

addition to the usual staff required for the hunt, and amongst them was the mare that Cis had been told in vain to go and look at that morning.

‘I came to have a look at that mare,’ said Georgie ; and the mare was trotted out for her to see.

Georgie stood aside and looked at her with the critical eye of a connoisseur.

She patted and stroked the animal ; then stooped down and felt all her legs deliberately one after the other with her strong little hand in a scientific manner that made old Ricketts say afterwards to Tom the whip, that he had never seen her like for a woman ; ‘a real fust rate ’un she be to be sure, Tom !’

‘I think I’ll ride her this winter, Ricketts ; she’d carry me well.’

‘Like a bird, miss. She’s a bit ticklish in

her temper ; but Lor' bless you, miss, there ain't nothing *you* can't ride.'

' Well, put a skirt on her this afternoon for a bit, and then you can bring her round to-morrow morning and I'll see how I like her paces.'

That was all the breaking-in for ladies' riding that Georgie's mounts ever had ; the spice of risk and danger about riding a horse that had never carried a lady before, was just what she enjoyed.

She left the two men staring after her with looks of respect and admiration, and went her way down a neighbouring lane, deep cut between two high banks, still closely followed by the dogs.

She had not gone very far before a thudding sound of horse's hoofs in the field to the right of her was greeted by a sharp bark from the puppy. Presently a horse's

head and forelegs appeared over the top of the hedge, and there dropped over into the lane just in front of her a young gentleman on a grey pony.

In one moment he had dismounted and was coming eagerly towards her.

‘Wattie!’ she exclaimed.

‘My little darling, how good of you to come!’

‘I didn’t come on purpose—really. I was at the kennels, and I thought—I thought——’

‘Little story-teller! you thought you would come home this way on the chance of seeing me—eh, Georgie?’ and Wattie Ellison proceeded to draw a very unresisting little woman close into his arms, and there to kiss her fondly on both cheeks, whilst Chanticleer, evidently suspecting mischief, pawed up against the back of his coat

with very muddy feet, and a gruff bark of remonstrance.

Walter, or as he was commonly called Wattie Ellison, was a nephew of Sir George Ellison, whose property adjoined Sotherne on the further side. He generally resided with his uncle, having neither profession nor income of his own, and the baronet, who was rather fond of him, made him free to the use of his hunters and the shooting of his game. Otherwise Sir George could do nothing more for him; he was a poor man with a large family of his own, and his eldest son had already burdened himself with the cares of matrimony in the shape of an invalid wife and four little children. This second family all lived permanently in the paternal mansion, and Wattie, in common with several of the younger sons, had an attic in an upper and unfrequented region

apportioned to him, which he was free to occupy whenever he chose; and being an orphan with no other family ties and no means whatever at his disposal, Wattie did choose to occupy his attic very often, notably during most of the shooting and hunting seasons. He picked up an odd five pound note now and then by selling a few water-colour sketches for which he had a good deal of natural talent; but even at this poor make-believe of earning money he did not work hard enough to make anything of a livelihood. As long as his uncle's house, and table, and horses were free to him, he did not seem to have the energy or perseverance to work hard at that or anything else.

He was a general favourite with every one. Tall and good-looking, with merry grey



eyes and curly brown hair, and the prettiest little moustache in the world, he was just the sort of young man to be spoilt by the whole female population. Women and children adored him. Nor was he any the less popular with the men. He rode so well, was such a crack shot, such good company in the billiard-room at night, and altogether such a manly young fellow in every way that he was sure of a welcome in every house he went into. But, alas! he was hopelessly ineligible; and dowagers with marriageable daughters found themselves forced to turn a deaf ear to his fascinations.

He was nothing but a penniless ne'er-do-weel, utterly without prospects. And yet what does this charming young scape-grace do but go and fall madly in love with the Squire's darling, precious Georgie! And worse, Georgie falls in love with him.

Their love affair was as yet in its earliest stages. They had not dared to tell the Squire. They continued to meet half by stealth, half by accident in their walks and rides, and in truth were so insanely happy in all the excitement and novelty of each other's affection, that they had scarcely had time to think of the future or to consider their situation with anything like serious attention. Woman-like, Georgie was the first to come out of this ecstatic fool's paradise. For the first time to-day she spoke to him seriously.

‘Wattie, dear,’ she said, as they went down the lane together, hand in hand, like a couple of children, whilst the pony and the dogs followed after them at their own sweet wills; ‘Wattie, I am afraid papa will never hear of it.’

‘Have you said anything to him, yet?’

‘No, I have not dared. Poor papa, it would upset him so horribly. I felt the way once by saying something about you, but he got so angry I did not venture to go on.’

‘He hates me, I suppose,’ said Wattie, with a rueful face.

‘Nonsense; only you know, dear, you are not exactly a good match, are you?’

‘Not exactly;’ and they both laughed.

‘If you had a profession,’ continued Georgie piteously; ‘even if you made nothing at it, it would sound better; and you see papa would like me to marry well. I am afraid he will stop it utterly.’

‘And, if he does stop it utterly, what shall you do?’ He stopped before her, holding her small face in both his hands, and forcing her to look up into his eyes.

‘I shall obey him, Wattie.’ Her voice was very low and gentle, but there was a

decision and firmness in the little face that filled him with dismay.

‘ You would give me up ! ’ cried Wattie.

‘ Not so, darling, ’ answered the girl. ‘ As long as I live I shall consider myself bound to you ; I will never marry anyone else. Perhaps, in time, he will relent and come round ; but till he does I will never marry you. Don’t hope it. ’ With all her tenderness and love he felt quite sure she meant what she said, and turned away from her with an impatient sigh. ‘ But, after all, why should we think of the worst ? ’ said Georgie, slipping her arm confidingly under his.

‘ Why, indeed ! ’ answered her lover, smiling. ‘ I daresay the old boy won’t be quite such a stern hard-hearted parent as we fear. It will all come right in the end, Georgie, depend upon it ! ’

Wattie was of a hopeful disposition (very

poor young men often are); nothing much worse could happen to him; he had nothing to lose, and it was quite on the cards that something better would turn up. But Georgie knew better. She knew what her father was, and she did not in the least think that things would come right in the end; not for a very long time at least; not probably, she reflected sadly, till she was getting old and *passée*, and Wattie, perhaps, half tired of a long and well-nigh hopeless engagement.

But she did not trouble her lover with these sad forebodings. For his sake she would be hopeful too, and look at the bright side of things as much as possible.

But as they walked on together they both by instinct avoided any further unpleasant consideration of what Mr. Travers would say to them.

There was nothing unusual in Georgie's walking about the lanes with young Ellison. He was so well-known by everybody and such an *enfant de la maison* in every family in the county that he was always turning up at odd places and with different people. Moreover, he had been Georgie's recognised slave and worshipper for ever so many years. Mr. Travers himself, who had no objection to him in the light of an admirer, whatever he might have in the more serious phase of lover, had often and often deputed young Ellison to look after his daughter in a stiff run. He generally gave her her leads, opened gates for her, tightened her girths, or altered her stirrup if she required it, and often rode back with her at the end of a long day, when the hounds left off far from home. He had been constantly thrown in her way, and certainly the Squire had only himself to

blame if these young people had fallen in love with each other.

He made the mistake of which so many parents are guilty. He allowed them to be constantly together under the most familiar circumstances, until they had fairly lost their hearts to each other and it was too late; and then, as you will see, expected to be able to stop all intercourse between them and to be obeyed like an autocrat.

I am inclined to think the much abused Belgravian mother, who warns off younger sons from her flock as she would the small-pox or scarlet fever, is the less culpable of the two. She, at all events, prevents the mischief, whereas parents who behave as did our friend, the Squire, cause their children an amount of misery and suffering which they can scarcely, it is to be hoped, understand or be aware of; whilst by a little forethought

and care it might all have been easily avoided.

It was arranged between Georgie and her lover before they parted that the dreaded communication was to be made by her to her father at the first seasonable opportunity.

‘Not this week, I think,’ said the girl; ‘we are so busy just now. I must wait, I think, till the first is over, and then, if we have anything of a run it will put him in a good temper, and I can tell him in the evening.’

‘As you like, you wise little woman. By the way, what are you going to ride this winter?’

‘The old chestnut, and I think that new mare papa bought last week; I have just been to see her.’

‘What, that dark brown mare he bought



down in Warwickshire? Don't ride her, Georgie. She's a nasty brute.'

'Why, what do you know of her? I like her looks myself, and papa bought her half on purpose for me.'

'Well, I heard a bad character of her down there; she's a runaway or something; she'll break your neck some day, Georgie.'

'Oh, I am not afraid; you won't get rid of me quite so easily as that. I shan't run far away from you, Wattie, and if I do I'm sure it will be a pleasure to you to run after me. And now I must say good-bye—indeed I must.'

'Little wretch! how quickly the time goes! I can't bear parting with you. I don't half like your having said you would throw me over if your father orders you to,' he added, as he bent over her, and kissed her tenderly.

‘ Ah, you don’t know what papa and I are to each other ; I couldn’t break his heart, Wattie, and I never will.’

Poor child, poor little Georgie ! There are some human vows that surely must be listened to with shouts of mocking laughter by the unseen world of spirits above and around us, if indeed, as it is said, they can read all our future lives as in a book.

Georgie Travers went home from that meeting with her lover to find herself very late for luncheon, and her mother scolding at her in her peevish ill-tempered voice.

‘ Where *have* you been, Georgie ? The mutton is quite cold. What have you been doing all this time ? ’

‘ I’ve been at the kennels,’ answered the girl, with that sort of half truth which is no lie in the eyes of most women. ‘ Never mind

about the mutton, mamma. I'll have some ham. I am sorry I kept you waiting.'

'Always at those horrid kennels with the stable boys!' grumbled her mother; 'so unlady-like and unfeminine!'

'Let the girl alone!' growled the master of the house with his mouth full of suet pudding, flaring up, as he always did, in defence of his favourite child. 'I don't want her turned into a cry-baby, like some of your children, Mrs. Travers; I wish her to go to the kennels. Did you see the mare, Georgie?'

'Yes, papa, I thought I'd ride her to-morrow. She isn't vicious, is she?' she asked with a little hesitation in her voice.

'Vicious? Who has been putting such rubbish into your head? As quiet as a sheep. Little Flora might ride her—or Cis!' he added, with a cut at his son

that was certainly rather cruel and uncalled for.

To everybody's surprise Cis got up with a very red face, and said,

‘Well, then, I will ride her, sir, if you will let me.’

The Squire looked taken aback.

‘Nonsense! You can't have her; she'd kick you off,’ he said, rather confusedly.

‘Then she isn't safe for Georgie,’ persisted Cis.

‘Safe as a house for her; you can't ride,’ said his father, gruffly. It must be confessed that he was a very trying sort of father to have.

Mrs. Travers said fretfully that she couldn't have dear Cis dragged about on wild horses.

‘Who wants to drag him, ma'am?’ shouted the old man, fairly in a rage. ‘He wouldn't

be half such a ninny if it wasn't for you. Keep him at home and give him some pap !' and he pushed his plate away—having previously quite emptied it—and bounced out of the room in a fury, slamming the door behind him till the door-frame, already in a very rickety condition, shivered and threatened to come bodily out into the room.

Mrs. Travers whimpered, and Cis got up and kissed her, while the younger girls looked at each other with meaning glances and faint titters, awestruck yet delighted, as children generally are in a row between their elders.

Amy seized the opportunity of the general confusion to help herself largely to strawberry jam with her plumcake ; whilst Flora slipped down under the table with a cold cutlet under her pinafore, with which she proceeded to feed old Chanticleer, much to that ancient hound's surprise and delight.

Meanwhile Georgie ate her ham in silence, with the pleasant consciousness of being the cause of the dispute to sharpen her appetite.

Such scenes were of daily occurrence at Broadley House. Who does not know of such households—households where everybody is at sixes and sevens ; where fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, are perpetually misunderstanding and mistaking each other's motives ; where there are two factions, the father's and the mother's, and one child sides with one, and one with the other, and where little quarrellings and bickerings and divisions, widen the breach slowly but surely day by day ?

When Georgie swallowed down her lunch in a hurry and slipped away from the room, her mother made sure she had gone to her father to talk against herself and was proportionally aggrieved. Whereas Georgie

had, in truth, gone up to her own little bedroom to think about her lover and to give herself up to delicious recollections of his words and his kisses.

Such a strange little maiden's bower it was! A long, low, half-furnished-looking room, only partially carpeted with strips of drugget, with a small camp bedstead at one end, and a chest of drawers and a wash-hand-stand at the other, and a rickety table and a few dilapidated wooden chairs about in the middle. Over the chimney-piece was a large-sized photograph in an Oxford frame, of her father in full hunting gear, mounted on his favourite horse Sunbeam; flanked on either side by two smaller pictures, representing severally, Ricketts the huntsman holding her own chestnut horse, and old Mike, the earth stopper, hugging a favourite fox terrier. Mike had grinned broadly at

the critical moment when he shouldn't have grinned, and had come out with his mouth stretched from ear to ear and no nose at all to speak of; and the terrier having incontinently wagged his tail, was permanently represented as owning two.

Above these specimens of art were nailed up a couple of horse-shoes, a miniature spur, supposed to fit on to Georgie's own small heel, and a large collection of riding whips. On the wall, over the chest of drawers, was carefully nailed a piece of crimson silk on which were hung in a row five brushes, surmounted by a stuffed fox's head. These were Georgie's greatest treasures, being all, as she would tell you with pride, her own 'earnings' on those red-letter days of her life when she had been the only lady 'in at the death.'

Into this retreat Georgie came after the



storm at lunch, hoping for a little peace which she was not long destined to enjoy. A tap at the door, and enter Cis, full of troubles and misery which, flinging himself down on the only sound chair in the room, he proceeded to pour forth.

Why was his father so hard on him? could he help his constitution? Why was he to be for ever sneered at and pitched into before everyone? 'Only this morning, Georgie, he spoke almost kindly—he wants me to marry Juliet.'

'Well, and you want to marry Juliet yourself, don't you?' said Georgie, who was well aware of her brother's passion. She had seated herself on the table, dangling her feet backwards and forwards in a manner that much endangered her stability on that ancient piece of furniture.

‘It is easy enough to please papa in that, Cis—isn’t it?’

‘But Juliet is so cold to me. You know I went to see her yesterday; she didn’t seem one bit glad to see me; and she has a way of over-looking one, as if one was nobody. Do you know all she found to say to me, after I had been there nearly ten minutes, was something about my whiskers!’

Georgie laughed merrily. ‘She was clever to find anything to say of them. I shouldn’t have thought them big enough to be worth mentioning! but then I’m your sister. Don’t despair, Cis—don’t be shy and timid with her; I am *sure* she is fond of you; and you know she has always been brought up to think of you as her lover. Her father wished it and your father wishes it. I am sure I think your path is a pretty easy one, with everybody to make it smooth, and

to clear away difficulties for you—heigho!’ And poor Georgie gave a rueful sigh at the thought of her own very hopeless-looking little history.

Cis, when he found anyone to listen to him could talk about Juliet by the hour; he straightway went off into a rhapsody about her—about her beauty, her talent, her singing, and her charms of every kind, which Georgie, although she admired and liked Juliet excessively, found after a time somewhat wearisome.

Where is the woman who can listen for long to the tale of the charms of another of her sex, without feeling bored?

When Cis came to offering to fetch his last poetical effusion in praise of his divinity in order that Georgie might fully enter into his feelings, she found she could stand it no

longer, and laughingly pushed him out of the room by the shoulders.

‘If you come to poetry, my reason will go, you love-sick swain. You’d better not show me any poems or I shall take them straight down to amuse papa!’ at which awful threat Cis vanished, and it is needless to say did *not* return with any poetry.

## CHAPTER V.

## JULIET MAKES A DISCOVERY.

THE days at Sotherne Court slipped away swiftly and peacefully. Mr. Bruce had left; there was no longer any reason for his remaining; the business which had brought him down was concluded, and he had other work in town to attend to. But Colonel Fleming still lingered; the weather was fine and the shooting was good, no one said a word about his leaving; he had nowhere else particularly to go, so he stopped on.

Mrs. Blair never came downstairs before luncheon time—there were in truth mysterious rites of the toilette to be gone through which

took many hours' labour, and which probably accounted better for her late appearance than the shattered nerves which she pleaded as her excuse.

Juliet and her guardian got into the way of spending these long morning hours together. One day he had found her by herself, writing in the breakfast room.

'Why not bring all that into the library and keep me company, Juliet?'

'Shall I not be in your way?' she had asked with a little hesitation.

'In my way? no, of course not! It is very unsociable of you to shut yourself up alone.'

After that she sat in the library every morning with him. They did not talk much. Colonel Fleming either read the papers or wrote his Indian letters, or else he made a pretence at looking over some of the So-

therne estate deeds, a perfectly unnecessary proceeding of which he himself was half ashamed. Juliet too wrote her letters or did her house accounts, or touched up her water-colour drawings.

One sat at one end of the table and one at the other. Williams, the bailiff and land agent, came in on business, then the coachman and gamekeeper for orders, or Mrs. Pearce, the housekeeper, knocked at the door with a 'might she speak to Miss Blair for one minute?' so that it was by no means an uninterrupted *tête-à-tête* that our two friends enjoyed. Still of course there were some mornings when no one disturbed them for several hours, and there is no denying that they found these mornings particularly delightful.

In the afternoons everything was altered. Mrs. Blair was downstairs; Cecil Travers

dropped in to lunch two days out of three, Colonel Fleming went out shooting, and Juliet drove or rode or walked, or stayed at home and received visitors, as she had always been accustomed to do before her guardian's arrival.

‘That young Travers comes here very often!’ remarked Colonel Fleming, one morning, breaking a long silence in which nothing had been audible but the scratch scratching of two pens hard at work.

‘Yes, he comes often,’ answered Juliet with a smile, not looking up from her writing.

‘He seems rather a muff,’ continued Colonel Fleming, disparagingly.

‘Oh, not at all, you are quite mistaken!’ she said, eagerly. ‘He is very delicate, poor boy, but he is really clever, he did so well at college, he reads a great deal,



and is very well informed ; but he is not at all appreciated in his home, poor Cis, because Mr. Travers thinks nothing of anyone who can't ride well, and it's so unfortunate for Cis that he is so timid constitutionally. He really *cannot* manage a horse in the least ; and if he went at a fence I believe he would tumble off. He is very painfully conscious of it himself, poor fellow. I always feel sorry for him, because he is so snubbed at home.'

'At all events he is appreciated here,' said Hugh, who had listened to her eager defence with a meaning smile.

Juliet blushed a little. No woman likes her suitor, be his suit ever so little favoured by herself, to be called a muff.

'You are fond of him, Juliet?' continued her guardian, with his head thrown back in his chair, and looking at her mischievously

through half-closed eyes ; he could read her thoughts as if she had spoken them.

‘I have known him all my life,’ answered Juliet, evasively. ‘I am used to him—why do you ask me?’

‘Never mind why ; the subject has an interest for me.’

She raised her eyes for one moment and met his. Ah, what a volume is sometimes written in one look !

It was but the work of a second, and then Colonel Fleming mercifully and humanely put up the ‘Times’ between himself and his ward that he might not see the glowing face of the girl as she bent it quickly down over her writing.

How her heart was beating ! surely he would hear it, she thought in dismay ; for in that one moment Juliet Blair had learnt her own secret !

Half with terror, half with a delicious joy, she had discovered that her heart was gone! I suppose no woman makes that discovery for the first time, without a spasm of absolute fear. Where will it lead her to? this new all-absorbing tyrant that has invaded her existence—what will be the end of it?

Juliet ordered her horse and took a long solitary ride that afternoon that she might think it all out and fairly realise this new thing that had come to her.

To a woman of weaker feelings and narrower mind, to be loved is generally more important than to love. Flattered vanity, gratified self-esteem, the natural pleasure that every woman has in taking the upper hand of the other sex, all these mingled feelings come in and help to make up what most women honestly believe to be love. In nine out of ten so-called love matches, the love is

all on the man's side, and the pleasure of being loved only on the woman's.

For Juliet Blair this was not so ; she loved the man of herself, not because he loved her, indeed she did not know, and hardly troubled herself to think in those first moments, whether he did love her at all. With all the depth and intensity of a nature that was at once passionate and devoted, impulsive and steadfast, she felt that she had learnt to love this man with the whole strength of her being. All her life-long others had worshipped and adored her ; she had been queen and they her slaves ; but this man was her master, without him her life had been an incomplete thing. With him her whole existence took a new meaning. Henceforth there was but one man on earth for her ; one who could stir her pulses or dominate her life, whose voice could thrill through her

heart, or whose presence could fill her soul with a joy that those alone who have loved with passion can understand.

And the man was Hugh Fleming. Not Cecil, the gentle, sensitive, affectionate boy who had adored her for years, who was her equal in years and position, whom all her friends had wished her to love and whom her dead father had chosen for her husband; not him, but the man who but a month ago had been utterly unknown to her, whose years doubled her own, whose life was half spent and whose youth was over, the man who was to have been her guardian and her adviser, who was to have guided her in her choice of a husband, and to have stood in her father's place at her wedding, and whom certainly that father had never for one moment contemplated in the light of her possible lover!

There was no shame in her heart that she had given her love unasked. It did not in those first moments trouble her whether or no it was likely to be returned. She was proud of it, proud of herself for loving him ; for was he not worthy to be loved ; was he not every-thing that a woman could most desire to possess? Strong in mind and body, was he not a man to whom she could turn instinctively for help and support ; whose judgment must be unerring, whose word must be her law?

But by-and-by as she rode slowly down a narrow lane, flicking the dying hedgerows idly with her whip, other thoughts began to stir her heart—there came to her a recollection of that ‘ past ’ in his life to which he had more than once alluded. Some love, as she had guessed, had once filled his life and was dead and gone, leaving behind a void and a

blank in his heart. Could that void never be filled up? had that past love been so powerful and intense, even such as she felt now in herself, that it could never be renewed? Would Hugh Fleming never love again?

Who is it who talks about first love—is it true that a man who has once loved can never love again, in the same manner?

And at these questions that she asked herself, the flush of excitement faded slowly from Juliet's cheek, and her face grew weary and sad.

All at once the landscape looked grey and dreary, the sunshine seemed to have faded, the trees with their falling leaves looked gaunt and cheerless; for the first time she noticed the white mist creeping up from the valley towards her. With a little shiver she turned her horse's head quickly and rode homewards.

In the hall at Sotherne, Cis Travers came eagerly forward to meet her.

‘Oh, here you are—I have been waiting for you. How long you have been out, Juliet ; how white you are ! You should not ride so far ; you look tired out,’ he said, following her with eager solicitude towards the staircase.

‘Let me alone,’ said Juliet crossly ; ‘don’t you suppose that I am old enough to take care of myself !’

An impulsive nature has always its weaknesses ; Juliet at that moment felt a positive dislike to the boy and his tender anxiety. The young fellow drew back abashed and repulsed by her fretful words.

Eventually she repented of her unkindness to him and asked him to stay to dinner, an invitation which Cis eagerly availed himself of.

Nothing had occurred that need have



altered her manner to her guardian, and yet she felt, when they met in the evening, that she could not speak naturally to him ; she was thankful for the presence of Cis Travers, and addressed herself almost exclusively to him all dinner time. She talked more than was usual to her, asking him numberless questions about himself and his interests, and reviving all sorts of half-playful, half-affectionate reminiscences concerning little incidents of their childish days. Cis had never seen her so gracious and so encouraging to him. His spirits rose, he became excited and animated, till Juliet, who had never before taken such pains to draw him out, was surprised to find how pleasantly he could talk.

Colonel Flening could not quite make her out ; he thought he was being punished for having called Cis a muff, and revenged

himself by being particularly pleasant to Mrs. Blair.

That lady was not slow to appreciate his attentions. She always laid herself out to fascinate him, but seldom met with such success as on this evening.

‘It is all this scarf *à la pompadour* with the *marquise* cap,’ she said to herself. ‘I knew it suited me to perfection, in spite of that little fool Ernestine.’ Ernestine was Mrs. Blair’s French maid.

Whereas, Colonel Fleming could hardly have told you at the end of the evening whether his fair charmer wore black or white, velvet or brown holland!

She was full of mysterious nods and winks, and little jerks of the head in the direction of the two young people.

‘How well they get on!’ she whispered behind her fan; ‘it will be all settled in a

few days, Colonel, you will see—don't they look happy together !'

' Let me give you a little more chicken !' said the Colonel, ignoring entirely, with a brutal indifference, the happiness of the young couple.

' Not any, thanks. Aha ! always so hard-hearted to a love affair, you naughty, cruel man !' laughed the widow softly. ' Ah ! If I could only give you a little of my *exquisite* sympathy in matters of the heart—I who have too much sensitiveness. My beloved husband used always to blame me for it. " My darling Maria," he used frequently to say to me, " try and control yourself ; you wear yourself out with so much sensibility " : and that is my defect. I am quite conscious of it,' she added, with a pretty sorrowful little sigh.

' Sense and sensibility,' said Hugh,

gallantly, with a touch of unperceived sarcasm; 'they generally go together!'

'Flatterer!' answered the lady, tapping his hand gently with her ever-ready fan. At which Juliet stopped short in the middle of what she was saying and stared at her, and then got very red and went on talking again.

Everybody was at odds that evening.

It is to be hoped that Mrs. Blair and Cis enjoyed themselves, for certainly the other two did not.

But after a night spent in sleeplessly tossing up and down upon her bed, in self-torturings and self-scoldings, Juliet rose in the morning in a more reasonable frame of mind.

It was a hopelessly wet day, wet and windy, with the leaves coming down off the trees in showers; a day that made Squire Travers rub his hands gleefully together as

he drew aside his blind and looked out of the window. 'That's the sort; soon bring the leaves all off the hedges at this rate!' he muttered hopefully to himself.

But Miss Blair, who was not so keen about hunting as her neighbour, and loved each season's pleasures in their turn, was sorry to see the last of her roses and scarlet geraniums lying all dashed and draggled on the sopping lawn. The whole valley was filled with a misty drizzle, and the west wind howled in a melancholy way among the tall chimneys of the old house.

Juliet met her guardian at breakfast with pitiful bemoanings over this dismal change in the weather. Let us be thankful that we are born under showery skies and changing winds, and that Providence has bestowed upon us a gift so appropriate to our needs as an ever-varying climate! Let us be thankful,

we that are blessed with neither the ease of manner nor the fluent tongue of our French neighbours, that are, on the contrary, awkward, silent, and self-conscious under trying circumstances—let us be thankful for the ever-ready subject of conversation which has been mercifully meted out to us to compensate in some measure for these defects.

Oh, much abused, much belied climate of the British Isles! Damp, rheumatic, neuralgic, unwholesome though you be—we owe you at least this, that you cover our mistakes, veil our confusions, screen our awkwardnesses, and provide for us, one and all, an easy and convenient channel whereby we may escape unscathed in the emotional moments of our lives.

Juliet was very thankful to the driving rain and lowering skies that day at breakfast. The morning papers did the rest, and

took away from the awkwardness of a *tête-à-tête* which she had never found oppressive before.

And yet—when she had gone about her household duties and scolded the cook, and consulted with the housekeeper, and made sundry insinuating suggestions to old Higgs the butler, who always called her ‘Miss Juliet,’ and treated her with a fatherly patronage as if the cellar was his personal property, out of which in consideration for her sex and general weakness he kindly allowed her to have a few bottles of wine—and yet, after these ordinary daily duties were completed, Juliet, with that perversity which is essentially a feminine peculiarity, went of her own accord into the library.

She was unreasonably disappointed and mortified to find the room empty, and sat down to her writing in the most aggrieved

frame of mind. After a few minutes, however, Colonel Fleming came in; he had a large portfolio under his arm, which he proceeded to deposit in front of her. 'I promised to show you my sketches some day, Juliet; as it is a wet morning suppose we look over them now.'

The girl was delighted, and soon got over her nervous self-consciousness in the pleasure of turning over the drawings and listening to his animated descriptions of the scenes and subjects they represented.

There were Indian temples and palaces, views on the Ganges, views of the Himalayas, spirited little subjects descriptive of pig-sticking and tiger hunts, all set in a gorgeous flare of Eastern colouring; side by side with tamer bits of woodland or sea coast, or dreamy distant views over English hedgerows and under English skies.



Juliet was enchanted with all she saw ; she had an artistic eye herself, and keenly appreciated the bold hand and correct colouring displayed in the sketches in Hugh Fleming's portfolio, indicating, as they did, no mean capacity for art.

She had looked them carefully all through, and was standing at the table replacing the drawings into the book, when there fluttered out from among them a small coloured crayon sketch which she had not noticed before, and which fell at her feet under the table.

Juliet stooped to pick it up. It was the head of a woman, a young girl, apparently of about seventeen, fair and delicate looking, with flaxen hair falling in curls on either side of her face in an old-fashioned way, and with large blue eyes and a gentle timid looking mouth. Underneath the sketch, in

Hugh's bold large handwriting, which Juliet had no difficulty in recognising, was written 'June 16, 1849,—My darling Annie.'

With an exclamation, Colonel Fleming attempted to take the little sketch from her hand. Juliet turned upon him speechless, but with crimson cheeks and blazing eyes, and in another instant the pale tinted face was torn right across, and the two pieces fell fluttering to the ground between them.

It was all the work of one minute, and in the next, Juliet, in an agony of shame and contrition, had burst into a passion of angry tears. Hugh Fleming turned first very white and then very red. He stooped down and picked up the damaged sketch.

'How could you be so careless, Juliet!' he said, trying to steady his voice, which trembled with some suppressed emotion; 'how stupid of you to tear this little old

sketch! I did not know I had it still. Don't cry, my dear child, it doesn't much signify : of course it was an accident—everyone has accidents occasionally. I am sure you will put the pieces together for me as well as you can, won't you?' and he thrust the drawing into her hand.

' Mr. Travers wishes to speak to you in the morning room, please, Miss,' here broke in Higgs, the butler, opening the door.

Juliet jumped up, hastily brushed away her tears, and murmuring something indistinct about being sorry for her stupidity, she hurriedly left the room, carrying away the torn fragments of the crayon sketch in her hand.

## CHAPTER VI.

## ERNESTINE LOOKS FOR A FAN.

CECIL TRAVERS was kept waiting fully a quarter of an hour for Miss Blair in the morning room. Emboldened by her manner to him on the previous evening, the unlucky youth had decided on coming over the first thing in the morning, to place his fate once more in her hands.

He could not as it happens have chosen a more inopportune moment.

Juliet came into the room with a thunder-cloud on her face—my heroine was not, as it will be noticed, blessed with an angelic temper.

‘What is it you want, Cis?’ she said as she entered the room; and certainly no more unpromising foundation whereupon to construct a declaration of love was ever presented to an unfortunate young man.

‘I came—I came—oh, Juliet!’ taking hold of both her hands; ‘you know very well what I have come for. You were so good to me last night, and so kind and nice, that I thought—I thought——’

‘You thought you would make an idiot of yourself once more; is that it, Cis?’

‘Oh, Juliet, I do so love you! Don’t you think you could like me a little? don’t you think you are fonder of me than you used to be?’

‘My dear Cis, I thought we had talked all this over before,’ said Juliet, sitting down and resigning herself to her fate. ‘I have told you over and over again that, though

I am fond of you as an old friend, you really must not expect anything more from me. Why don't you try and put the idea out of your head?'

The boy stood silent before her with a downcast face and the tears slowly welling up into his blue eyes.

'Come, come, Cis,' said Juliet, touched by the sight of his sorrow and putting out her hand kindly towards him. 'Come, be a man; look at it in its proper light. I don't love you in that way, Cis, and I never shall, never! We should not be in the least suited to each other. Though you are two years older than I am, yet I am years older in life than you; you would go your way and I mine. We should never be happy together. And, besides, I don't love you as your wife should love you. Cis, my poor old boy, don't look so unhappy; there are plenty

more women in the world, far better than I am, who will be fond of you some day.'

'Oh, don't talk to me of other women, I can't bear it!' groaned Cis, turning away from her to hide his face of misery. 'Don't take away hope, Juliet, tell me to wait. I have been too quick again, I haven't given you time enough. I will go away again and wait—years—any time you like, only for God's sake don't say you won't let me come here and see you as usual!'

'Of course, Cis, come here as usual—why after knowing you all my life how could I say otherwise! But indeed, indeed, I don't think I must let you hope anything else. I will be your friend all my life, Cis, but don't ask me for anything more.'

Poor Cis was fairly sobbing; he leant his head down on the table and gave free vent

to his misery, whilst Juliet, with those half measures that women so selfishly delight in, thought to console him by standing over him, stroking his hands, and pushing back his fair hair from his forehead; she even stooped down and gave him a gentle kiss, murmuring the most affectionate and tender words into his ear—proceedings which filled the unhappy Cis with a mixture of ecstasy and wretchedness that sent him almost beside himself.

When, however, wound up to a pitch of absolute despair by her kindness, Cis went down on his knees before her, clung to her hands with passionate kisses, and entreated her to relent and promise to marry him, Juliet, after the manner of her capricious sex, drew back, spoke to him shortly and sternly, told him to get up and not make a fool of himself, and used other such wholesome but



unpalatable words as quickly brought the young gentleman to his senses.

‘It is time you went, Cis ; I don’t want a scene, and I can say nothing more to you ; take my advice—go away from home for a little while, and then, when you are more sensible and can look at things in a brighter light, come back and see me again.’

‘Yes, I will do everything you think best ; I will go away, and I won’t bother you again—at least, not yet ; but I shall love you all my life, Juliet. I don’t think I am such a boy as you think ; at all events it is no boy’s love that I feel. I shall never marry anyone else but you, and if you won’t have me for a husband I will stand by you as your friend and your brother till I die !’ So, very crestfallen, but not altogether ingloriously, Cis Travers took his departure.

‘Wasn’t Cis Travers here this morning?’ asked Mrs. Blair of her stepdaughter as they sat together over their fancy work that afternoon.

‘Yes, he was,’ answered Juliet rather shortly.

‘I hope you haven’t refused him again, Juliet,’ said the widow, enquiringly, looking closely at her.

‘What if I had! I don’t know that I need confide Cis’ love affairs to anyone, Mrs. Blair,’ said the girl resentfully; for to bully her about Cis was one of Mrs. Blair’s favourite amusements.

‘Juliet, I *hope* you haven’t sent that poor young man quite away; I hope you have given him a little encouragement.’

‘What *does* it matter,’ said Juliet, jumping up and scattering her fancy work on to the carpet. ‘When I am engaged to be

married, I will let you know at once, Mrs. Blair, you may be quite sure of *that!*' This was added defiantly with distinct allusion to the fact which was tacitly understood between them, that when she married, Mrs. Blair would probably have to seek other quarters.

Juliet gathered up her tumbled worsteds and silks and left the room with a little short laugh which, had she seen the malignant glance which her stepmother cast after her, would probably have been less triumphant.

Mademoiselle Ernestine, Mrs. Blair's French maid, was a young woman of varied accomplishments and great discretion of character.

Not only was she a consummate artiste in all the intricacies of dress and fashion, in all the mysterious and varied methods of adorning the hair, and of still more mysterious

processes of beautifying the human countenance, into which it does not become you and me, oh my reader, to pry too closely !' but also was this young person an astute observer of life and character. She knew when to speak and what to say, and she knew also, —oh rare and wonderful talent in a woman ! —she knew when to hold her tongue.

That same evening whilst Ernestine was brushing out those mysterious plaits and bows of Mrs. Blair's fair hair, of which no mortal being save those two could entirely guess the wondrous construction, the lady observed carelessly,

'Miss Blair cannot go much out into the garden in the morning this weather, can she Ernestine ?'

'Oh no, madame ! What a privation for Mademoiselle ! she so fond of the flowers !'

'And it must be dull for her in the

morning-room all by herself, mustn't it?' continued the widow.

'Ah oui Madame, cette pauvre chère demoiselle! it must be triste à faire peur; it is certainly no wonder that Mademoiselle should refugiate herself in the librairie with Monsieur le Colonel, who is so silent and quiet, not a companion so cheerful as a lady would be for her, pauvre demoiselle!'

'Thanks, that will do for to-night, Ernestine; bring me my slippers and my book of Meditations. I don't want you any more. Good-night.' And the waiting maid was dismissed.

The next morning when Ernestine brought in her mistress' cup of chocolate, the lady said to her as she drew aside the bed curtain and placed the dainty little china tray beside her,

'Go down into the library, Ernestine, and

look for my fan ; I think I left it there last night.'

The fan lay conspicuously on the dressing-table, but Ernestine who could be dumb or deaf or blind as occasion demanded, answered demurely,

'Oui, madame ;' and departed.

In the course of five minutes she returned.

'I cannot find it anywhere, madame, and ah, tiens, there it is ! Dieu, que je suis bête ! and I who searched everywhere under all the tables, and monsieur himself was so good as to help me to look ; but mademoiselle said she felt sure you had taken it up stairs with you !' Having thus imparted the information which she knew was required, mademoiselle Ernestine busied herself about the room.

'Ernestine,' said Mrs. Blair, after a few minutes, 'I feel so fresh and well this morn-

ing, I think if you will bring me my bath I will get up at once ; it is a nice morning, isn't it ?'

It was a gusty showery day hardly finer than its predecessor ; but Ernestine replied with alacrity that it was 'adorablement beau '' and Mrs. Blair proceeded to get up.

Downstairs, Juliet was standing timidly at the back of Colonel Fleming's chair holding in her hand the torn sketch very carefully pasted on to a piece of cardboard, so that the rent was almost invisible. 'I—I have mended it as well as I could,' she was saying with a crimson face and a trembling voice.

Colonel Fleming waited for half a minute before laying down his pen and turning towards her, possibly in order to give her time to control herself.

'You have mended what? Oh, ah, the

little sketch ! ' he said, not looking up at her ;  
' that is very kind of you, there was no hurry  
about it. It is a pretty face, is it not? Would  
you like me to tell you the story of that poor  
girl, Juliet? I think you would be sorry for  
her ; sit down here,' wheeling an arm-chair  
in front of the fire for her ; 'there, are you  
comfortable ? let me give you a footstool ; and  
now I will tell you about her.' Juliet sat as  
she was told and looked away from him into  
the fire.

' Everyone, I suppose, has some romance,  
either sad or sweet, in their past lives, and  
Annie Chalmers is mine,' he began, not  
looking at her, whilst Juliet's heart beat fast  
and painfully.

' It was years and years ago, almost  
before you were born, that I first met her.  
She was the sweetest, gentlest, most innocent  
little soul that God ever created. She lived



alone with her father in a tiny house just on the outskirts of a great deep wood. I was in the —th then, and we were quartered in the neighbouring dead-alive little Cathedral town. Perhaps at first it was only for want of something better to do, but at all events I got into the habit of walking out to their cottage on summer evenings. I used to stroll over there in the dusk, and her father and I would sit outside in the garden smoking our pipes by the open window, and she used to sit inside in the darkness singing to us all sorts of quaint old-fashioned songs in her sweet pure voice ; and then, when I went away, she would walk out to the end of the garden with me and stand and talk to me at the 'gate before I left. One night we were standing there together under the honeysuckle archway ; there were all sorts of sweet smells in the air from the midsummer

flowers about us, and the moonshine was gleaming white and still over the lawn, and through the dark trunks of the trees in the wood beyond ; presently, I recollect, a soft white owlet flew by us with a little cry that made her start and cling to my hand. It was all so silent that we could hear the brook tinkling over the stones at the bottom of the field ; and we ourselves ceased talking, to listen to the still voices of the night ; and then, I don't know how it all came about, or why I did it, but suddenly I took my darling into my arms all in the silver midsummer's moonlight and told her that I loved her, and found out from the fluttering of her heart that she too loved me.

‘Well, it was of course the most foolish and imprudent engagement that two young things ever entered into. I had nothing but my pay in those days and she was absolutely

penniless. Her father stormed and swore at me a bit at first, but after a day or two, when Annie had hung on his neck and wept and prayed and entreated, he had no longer the heart to refuse her anything. He found out, heaven knows by what pinching and saving and selling out of his slender capital, that he could give her a thousand pounds, and for the rest we must live on my pay, and trust, as so many do, to luck or chance, to rub along through life as best we could.

‘Annie, dear little soul, had no fears. What were butchers’ and bakers’ bills to her! Such sordid vulgar cares never troubled her; her home had been certainly a modest one, but still she had never been brought face to face with dunning tradesmen or pinching penury. She had beautiful high-flown poetical ideas about the delight of starving with me on a crust of bread, and

giving up everything else on earth for love— words of which, poor child, she had not in fact the faintest comprehension ; she used to trip along by my side with her hands twisted over my arm, solemnly going over in one moment all she would do and bear and suffer for my sake, in a way that when I gazed down at her little fragile figure that looked as if the first rough wind must blow her away, made my heart sink with dismay ; and then in the next moment she would be prattling like a child of the home we should have together, all filled with fresh flowers and bright-coloured chintzes and pink and white muslin, till I could not help smiling at her simplicity, and her utter ignorance of the harsh unlovely world I was going to take her into.'

It will surprise no one to learn that at

this juncture Miss Blair mentally ejaculated, 'Little fool !'

'Well,' continued Hugh Fleming, after a moment's pause, 'well, after we had been engaged about six weeks, orders came for my regiment to go to India. That was a dreadful blow for the old man ; if he had known it at the first, I doubt if he would ever have consented to our engagement ; but it was too late now. Annie said her heart would break if she was not allowed to go out with me ; her father could not help himself, he was obliged to hide his own suffering and to let her go.

'Of course the result of the change in my prospects was that we must be married at once. We had to start in a month and there was barely time to get ready her outfit and to make all arrangements for our wedding, so

as to allow us a clear week in England before embarking at Southampton.

‘Privately, Annie and I thought the Horse Guards had played into our hands in the most delightful and exemplary manner in the world! Instead of being doomed to the tedium of a long and uncertain engagement, here were we forced, as it were, into immediate matrimony by circumstances over which we had no control whatever. We were careful, however, not to hurt the old man’s feelings by any unseemly display of this very selfish glee.

‘I can hardly remember all that happened during those last three weeks. I know we were both very busy; she went up to London for two days to stay with an aunt who was to help her to get her things, and I, too, was obliged to run up to town two or three times. What with extra regimental

duties consequent on such a sudden start, looking after the men's outfits and my own, and what with having to go, again and again, to the lawyers to see about the settlement of her thousand pounds,—and lawyers can take as much time over one thousand pounds as they can over sixty—you may fancy that I had plenty of business on my hands and had not much spare time left for anything. In truth I saw very little of Annie just then, a fact which has since caused me endless and most painful self-reproaches.

‘I was continually thinking that as I was so soon to have her all to myself it did not so much matter that so many days slipped by without my seeing her at all. Alas! if I had but known.

‘At last everything was settled, and Jim Lester, our Major, was to be my best man.

He is dead now, poor fellow ; he was killed at Lucknow. Such a tall handsome man he was—he always did best man to all the young fellows in the regiment who made fools of themselves, as he would say, and then stood godfather to their first babies. He was so accustomed to it, he used to say, that he could do either office in his sleep ; his only fear being that he might some day forget at which ceremony he was assisting and interpolate sponsorial answers into the solemnisation of Holy Matrimony. Indeed, there was a story currently reported and universally believed in, that being best man on one occasion to a certain Captain Gordon, who was fortunate enough to win the hand of a very pretty heiress much run after by all the unmarried officers in the —th, the parson having duly asked “Wilt thou take this woman to be thy wedded wife, etc.,” Jim Lester in a loud



and fervent voice, audible all over the church, made response, "That is my desire," which so took away the bridegroom's breath that he was completely placed *hors de combat* and never answered "I will" at all, so that the clergyman had to proceed rapidly to the next paragraph in the service in order to cover his hopeless confusion, whilst Jim Lester never found out that he had done anything wrong until the time came for kissing the bridesmaids in the vestry!

'Well, the day before the wedding day came, and I went over to the cottage. The peaceful house seemed strange and unlike itself. There was the aunt from London, and two cousins who were to be her bridesmaids, and a clergyman uncle who was to marry us. We had a scramble picnic tea-party in Mr. Chalmers' little smoking room, as the dining room, I was told, was laid

out for the next day's feast. We were all very merry, but my Annie looked a little pale and worried.

' When I rose to go she followed me out of the room.

' "Look here," she said, and turned the key of the dining-room door and made me go in. "Isn't it pretty? I have arranged it all myself, it only wants a few more flowers round the cake to be perfect."

' There was the table all laid out with snowy linen and bright glass, and piles of fruit and pastry in silver dishes, and in the middle the white sugared bridal cake, and over all a perfect flower garden of roses and fuschias, and great white Ascension lilies in scented pyramids.

' "Isn't it lovely? and I have arranged all the flowers myself."

' "You have tired yourself out, I am

afraid, little woman," I said, drawing her near to me.

"But isn't it pretty, Hugh?" she asked again.

"And then I praised her handiwork, with heaven knows how many foolishly fond lover's words.

"I must go now," I said.

"Then say, good-bye, Hugh," she answered, putting up her arms round my neck.

"Good-night," I answered.

"Not good-night! say good-bye," she persisted.

"Why good-bye, Annie? surely good-night is a more fitting word between us now."

"But I should like you to say good-bye, best; it is good-bye to Annie Chalmers you know."

‘I have often wondered what made her say this ; whether it was but a mere chance whim, or whether, indeed, there was some presentiment in her mind of what the morrow was to bring forth. At the time I thought nothing of it ; I smiled at her fanciful request, and granted it playfully ; and then she came down the garden with me, and stood in the honeysuckle archway after I parted from her, as she had been always accustomed to do. When I reached the corner of the wood I turned to wave my hand to her ; there she stood, a slight white motionless figure looking after me in the dusky twilight. I never saw her again alive ; never, never.

‘Early the next morning, half an hour even before the very early hour at which I had ordered my servant to call me, I was awakened by a clattering of horse’s hoofs

on the stones of the Barrack yard, outside my window. I don't know why, but there seemed something ominous to me in the sound; there was nothing very unusual in it, and yet somehow I connected it immediately with myself. Five minutes after Jim Lester came into my room with a face as scared and white as if he had seen a ghost.

“Something is wrong, Fleming; you must get up at once, and we must go over to the cottage. I have ordered my dog-cart; be as quick as you can—and,” he added, as he turned away again to the door, “put on your shooting-jacket, old fellow;” and by that I knew there would be no wedding for me that day!

‘Dear old Jim Lester! who that had known you could say that there are not men in the world as pitiful, as tender-hearted, as

full of the exquisite tact of perfect sympathy and heaven born compassion, as any woman that ever lived !

‘ During that two miles’ drive to the cottage in Jim’s dog cart, we neither of us spoke one single word. I did not dare ask what had happened, or whether he knew. An awful certainty of the truth was upon me, and yet I kept on saying over and over again to myself :

‘ “ Of course, it’s old Chalmers has had a stroke ; of course it’s the old man ; old men always have strokes and fits.”

‘ Once I think I said it aloud, and then Jim just laid his hand lightly on mine for a minute, as a woman might have done, but he never spoke.

‘ But when I got there, there was no longer any need for me to ask ; a frightened group of women stood in the narrow hall.

When I came in at the doorway they made way for me to pass in silence, and I walked straight upstairs.

‘ On the little landing above, a door opened, and some one said, “ Here he is.”

‘ And then old Chalmers said, “ Oh, my poor boy !” and took my hand and led me into the room.

‘ *Her* room ! On a chair was huddled up her wedding finery, her white dress and her veil, and the orange blossoms ; the bouquet I had had sent her from Covent Garden the day before, lay on the dressing-table. I think I saw them all in that one moment, down to her gloves knocked off the table and lying on the floor beside her little satin slippers. And she—my bride, my darling—lay there on the still warm and ruffled bed, which she had apparently but just left, dead—quite dead !

‘It was the doctor behind me who spoke.  
“It is heart disease, nothing could have saved her ; it must have been the fatigue and excitement that killed her ; she could not have suffered at all, we must be thankful for that.”

“‘Why was I not sent for?’ I said hoarsely.  
“There was no time” said the father ; “she was dressing and felt a little faint, she called her cousin from the next room, and she was so frightened at the look in her face that she called her mother. They had hardly time to fetch me—as I came into the room, she died.”

‘And then I don’t know what happened. I think I fell forward on to the bed with an exceeding bitter cry, and everything became darkness around me. Then like a voice out of a fog someone said, “Take him away, he should not be here, poor fellow ; take him out of the room.”’



‘And it was the Aunt I think who led me downstairs by the hand, I groping my way down like a blind man.

“Not there, not there, anywhere but there!” I cried as the poor woman, hardly conscious probably of what she was doing, opened the dining-room door.

‘For there I saw again the white table all laid out with the fruits and the bridal cake, and the roses and the white Ascension lilies, and seemed to hear again my darling’s voice, “Isn’t it pretty, Hugh? say good-bye to me, not good-night; say goodbye,” as she had said it only last night.

‘Ah, God, that was an awful day! to this hour I shudder when I think of it.

‘There is not much more to tell you, Juliet. A few days later and I was standing by her open grave in the little churchyard,

through which I had thought she would have passed by my side in all her bridal finery.

‘It killed her father, he only survived about a year. I heard afterwards that her mother had died suddenly in the same way; so I suppose she had inherited a weak heart from her. I went out to India the following week alone, and except to Jim Lester, from that day to this, Juliet, you are the first person to whom the name of Annie Chalmers has passed my lips.’

Colonel Fleming ceased speaking and for a few minutes there was silence in the room; only the clock ticked on between them, and a blazing coal fell noisily out of the grate into the fender.

Then he got up and came and stood over her. ‘I have told you my story, Juliet; you see it is all past and gone by, a great many years ago; my life is perhaps over, and yours

is only just beginning—now tell me something; why did you so ruthlessly tear that poor little face in half yesterday?’

‘You—you said it was an accident; besides I did not know,’ stammered Juliet, crimsoning painfully.

‘That is no answer, Juliet—why did you do it?’

He bent down over her and took hold of both her hands, and the lids drooped over her conscious eyes that could not look up to meet his.

‘I *will* know; why did you do it? child, tell me!’ and there was a tremor of unspoken passion in his voice.

‘Tell me, darling—why did you?’

‘Ah, good morning good people!’ He dropped Juliet’s hands as if they burnt him, and they both started apart guiltily as Mrs. Blair, all radiant in grey cashmere and pink

silk, with a white shetland shawl becomingly draped over her shoulders, sailed into the room.

‘ Good morning, Colonel ; now where *can* that black and gold fan of mine be ! Ernestine is as blind as a bat, and never can find anything, and I *know* I must have left it here last night ; Juliet love, is it not on that table near you ?—no ? then where can it be ! Ah, here is that silly Ernestine ! ’ and enter that damsel demurely carrying the fan.

‘ Here is the fan, madame ; I have found him on your table of toilette under the sachet.’

How both these consummate actresses managed to keep their countenances to each other during this playing out of their little parts, was certainly almost miraculous !

## CHAPTER VII.

## MR. BRUCE'S LETTER.

‘ You will let me sit here and write a letter, won’t you, Colonel Fleming ? ’ said Mrs. Blair, when Juliet on her inopportune entrance had effected a hasty retreat.

Of course Colonel Fleming was delighted to have Mrs. Blair’s company. From his using it so much, the room had come to be looked upon as essentially his.

The lady sat down, dipped her pen in the ink, and began to write. Now and then she glanced at her companion, who, with a perfectly impassive face, sat apparently absorbed in the ‘ Saturday Review.’

It was not a very long letter, but the composition of it seemed to afford her a good deal of trouble, for she laid down her pen and pondered several times.

‘You must be *very* urgent,’ she wrote, ‘for I fear Juliet is inclined to be headstrong, and to throw herself away in an entirely new and *most undeserving* quarter ; it would be a dreadful mistake, and with such a property. The responsibility rests almost entirely on yourself.’ And then she signed herself and put up the letter in a faint-scented, grey-tinted envelope, which she sealed and addressed to ‘Josiah Bruce, Esq., 199 Austin Friars, City,’ with an underlined *Private* in large letters in the left-hand corner.

It is astonishing how affectionately devoted Mrs. Blair was to her stepdaughter all that day. She hardly let her out of her sight; she was untiring in her efforts to

amuse and entertain her ; she offered to wind her wools, to play her accompaniments, to go with her out driving, even to help her with her visits in the village.

Juliet was in such a strange, exalted state of mind that she was scarcely conscious of these unwonted attentions ; but, when the evening came, she found that she had not spoken a single word to her guardian since the morning.

When they went upstairs to bed, Mrs. Blair did a most unusual thing ; she followed Juliet into her bedroom.

‘ Juliet, love, I have something to say to you ; I fear something you won’t like—something disagreeable.’

‘ One seldom does like disagreeable things, my dear Mrs. Blair. What is it that you are going to tell me ? ’

‘ Well, dear, it is about yourself. You

don't generally like my advice even when it is best meant, I know ; but still——'

'I am afraid I am not very amenable to advice,' said the girl, with a momentary softening towards the woman whose falseness she always instinctively fathomed with the clear-sightedness of a perfectly candid and sincere nature ; 'you know I have had my own way so much ; but I shall really be glad to listen to any advice you can give me.'

'Well, love, it is about Colonel Fleming and yourself.'

'What do you mean?' In an instant she was like a creature at bay, turning on her stepmother with flashing eyes,

'Don't get angry, Juliet ; but do you think it is *quite* wise or prudent to sit so much alone in the library with Colonel Fleming in the morning ? Of course you and



I know what nonsense such a thing must be ; but people are so stupid, and it gives rise to talk.'

' People, what people? and who talks? '

' Why things are said in the house—in the servants' hall.'

' How *dare* they! ' cried Juliet, frantically.

' Yes, of course, love, it is most impertinent ; but, you see, servants notice things just like anyone else,' said Mrs. Blair deprecatingly.

' How can you lower yourself to listen to tittle-tattle from the servants' hall, Mrs. Blair? '

' Hush, hush! my dear, don't scold at me; I never listen, never; as I always tell Ernestine, "don't bring things to *me*." '

' I hate that Ernestine!' broke in the girl passionately.

‘Ernestine is a very valuable servant, and I don’t intend to part with her,’ said Mrs. Blair, with a touch of temper, which, however, was instantly suppressed; ‘but, my love, that is not the point; as I was saying, they *will* talk, and isn’t it a pity to give occasion for such talk? Of course you and I know how absurd it is, quite ridiculous, in fact; a man such years older than yourself, so grave and serious, and your guardian too; something almost improper in the idea, isn’t there? and you half engaged to Cis Travers too!’

‘Be good enough to leave Cis Travers’ name out of the question, Mrs. Blair,’ said Juliet, by this time fairly stamping with fury. ‘I consider myself quite incapable of doing anything that is unseemly or unfitting to my position in this house, and I shall certainly not alter my conduct for any

impertinent remarks which may be made upon it by your maid ! ’

‘ Well, dearest, don’t be so angry about it ; I am sure I only meant to give you a motherly hint, and you must not bear me a grudge for it, will you, darling ? ’

‘ Thank you ; I daresay you thought it was your duty,’ said Juliet, coldly ; at which Mrs. Blair declared she was a sweet, dear, warm-hearted, generous-souled darling, flung her arms round her, and kissed her almost with rapture, Juliet submitting to the operation with a very bad grace.

But afterwards the shot told, as Mrs. Blair, who understood her victim, probably knew that it would. For Juliet breakfasted in her own room the next morning, and then it being a bright fine day, went straight out to the home farm, and the village, and to call on the clergyman’s wife, and did

not come in till the luncheon-bell was ringing. As she entered she met Colonel Fleming in the hall.

‘Why, where have you been hiding yourself all the morning?’ he said, as he went forward to greet her.

‘I have been out; I had to go into the village and to the farm.’

‘You mustn’t do that again. I can’t spare you; I have wanted you all the morning,’ he said, with a ring in his voice that sent a thrill of delight to her heart.

And then Mrs. Blair came sailing down upon them from above, and they all three went in to luncheon.

Juliet decided that she would not punish herself so foolishly another day; she would go into the library, as usual, the next morning.

But the next morning, fate, in the shape

of a letter in a blue envelope that lay by Colonel Fleming's plate at breakfast time, intervened.

The letter ran thus :

‘Dear Sir,—I very much wish you would run up to town for a few days ; to begin with, I should like you to meet Davidson about the sale of those small Dorsetshire farms, as we could settle it all so much better in a personal interview with him. I also much wish to have some talk with you about another matter that is most seriously on my conscience, namely, the Travers alliance. I have had a visit from young Mr. Travers himself, who has been good enough to honour me with his confidence, and I have also received a letter from his father on the same subject, and I think that you and I, my dear sir, shall be wanting in our duty

to Miss Blair, and in our due regard for the maintenance of her very fine property, if we do not do our utmost to carry out her late father's wishes in this most important point

'I am, sir, yours faithfully,

'JOSIAH BRUCE.'

Colonel Fleming read this letter over twice most carefully, and then laid it down by the side of his plate and went on with his breakfast in absolute silence.

'Can I have the dog-cart to take me to the station this morning to meet the 12.30 train, Juliet?' he asked, after some minutes.

'Certainly; but why?'

'I find I must go up to town to-day.'

'Then I will drive you to the station in my pony carriage; that will be much pleasanter, don't you think so?'

'No doubt, fair hostess; but I fear it is

not possible, as I must take my portmanteau.'

'Your portmanteau! Why I thought you meant for the day! For how long are you going?' said Juliet, laying down her knife and fork.

'I must be away a few days, perhaps a week,' he answered, not looking at her and speaking rather rapidly.

'A week!' she repeated, with a dull dismay in her voice.

'Yes, I have a good many things I ought to begin to see to. Time slips away so rapidly, and my leave will not last for ever; and now Mr. Bruce writes that he wants to see me about—about the Dorsetshire farms you have settled to sell. Yes, I think it will take me about a week. If you will kindly excuse me, I will go and see after putting

up my things.' He spoke rather nervously, and rose to leave the room.

' Oh, let Higgs see to all that,' said Juliet, impatiently.

' Thanks ; I will go and speak to him ;' and he went.

Juliet sat still in a sort of stupor. A week ! what an endless blank of days it seemed ; what a sudden break in her fool's paradise ! What could take him away from her like that for a whole week ? with so much that was unspoken between them, and that last question that he had asked her still unanswered !

Almost before she had realised that he was really going, she heard the sound of the wheels of the dog-cart driving up to the door, and she met the footman carrying down his hat-box and portmanteau, and he himself



in stiff London clothes and a tall hat, following the man downstairs.

‘ Must you really be off? ’

Poor child ! A far less accurate observer of human character than was Hugh Fleming could hardly have failed to trace the despondency in her face and voice as she spoke.

‘ I must really, I am afraid ; unless I want to lose my train,’ he answered, smiling ; ‘ but I shall come back, Juliet ; certainly in a week, perhaps sooner ; I shall come back.’

‘ You are sure ? ’ she asked almost entreatingly ; and he answered very gravely,

‘ Yes. In any case, I shall come back.’

And then he jumped into the dog-cart, gathered up the reins, lifted his hat to her, and drove off ; whilst she stood leaning in the open doorway, watching till he was out

of sight. A tall graceful figure, clad in soft brown velvet, with large wistful dark eyes that seemed almost as if they might be full of tears as they looked after him.

Did he think, I wonder, as he looked back at her, of that other girl in her white dress who had so stood under a honeysuckle archway, on a midsummer's evening, twenty years ago?

Not much, I fancy.

How desolate and dull the house seemed to Juliet as she turned back into it again after he was gone! she wandered about aimlessly, not knowing what to do with herself. At last she went into the library, where everything most reminded her of him.

His books, some of his papers, and his writing things lay scattered on the table where he was accustomed to sit; she fin-

gered them lovingly one after the other, and then began to put them together, smoothing out the papers and putting them in order with a touch that was lingering and reverent, as if they had been relics.

Presently she caught sight of the portfolio of his drawings leaning up against the wall. She sat down on the floor in front of it, and began turning over the sketches eagerly until she found again the little crayon head she had first so ruthlessly torn and then so laboriously mended. Leaning her head on her hand and holding it out before her, Juliet Blair gazed long and intently at it.

Poor, pale, sweet face! now that she knew its story, how full of touching meaning were the blue eyes and the little timid mouth!

Poor little bride, dead on her wedding

morning ! was ever story so pitiful, so heart-rending as hers !

And yet her living rival, with her rich warm colouring and glorious eyes, with twice her beauty and ten times her talent, sat staring at the faint pale face with all the passion of unreasoning jealousy raging at her heart.

This was the girl who had possessed his first, best affections ; who was his ideal, his religion in woman, who had won from him that intense devotion of his early manhood which can never in any man be exactly reproduced again !

Was she unfortunate, was she poor ? Nay, rather most fortunate, most blessed, most rich Annie Chalmers, to have known how to win his whole heart, to have possessed the first love of such a man as Hugh Fleming, even if with her life she had

paid the forfeit of such intense, such unspeakable joy!

For what was left to her—to Juliet Blair? Nothing but the wreck of a heart that had scarcely even now recovered that early shock; the fragments of a life that was broken up and spoilt; the tangled thread that might never possibly be entirely made straight again. And was she sure even of this? Alas! no.

I do not think that, from what you have seen of my Juliet, you will misunderstand her when I tell you that there was little pity, little compassion in her heart towards that poor dead girl whose story nevertheless had affected her in the telling; but only a great envy and a great bitterness of soul.

Meanwhile Colonel Hugh Fleming was leaning back in a first-class smoking carriage of the Great Western Railway Company with

a cigar in his mouth, going through a course of the most unpleasant self-examinations.

Was he a blackguard? he asked himself angrily; had he no sense of honour left that he must go and stay in a girl's house as her guardian, and then try to steal her heart as a lover?

She, with all her money, and he, with nothing save his Indian appointment! What had he been doing? what had he been thinking about? Over what precipice had his selfishness well-nigh hurried him when Mr. Bruce's timely reminder had recalled him suddenly to his senses? Good heavens! was this honour? was this conscientiousness? was this fulfilling the responsibility her father had delegated to him? What opprobrious names would not be rightly cast at him by everybody belonging to her were he to do this mean, base deed, and take advan-

tage of his position with her to gain possession of her wealth !

Ah ! but the child was learning to love him ; could he not read it in those dark eyes that could hardly meet his, in her burning cheeks and trembling lips, and still more in all the little flashes of temper and jealousy that betrayed her secret to him a hundred times a day ? Only learning as yet, he trusted ; she would unlearn the lesson soon enough if he showed her how ; her pride, her spirit would carry her through it. Alas ! why was she not poor like himself ; why was she clogged with all these riches ? Oh God ! but it was hard to have such happiness once more within his reach and this time to have to push it away from him with his own hands !

When he got to town he put himself into

a hansom and went straight down to Austin Friars.

Mr. Bruce was at home, and delighted to see him.

He plunged at once into all the advantages of the 'alliance,' as he would call it. It would be the making of the property; just what was always wanted to make it the finest and most valuable in the county. The families had always been friendly, and her father had set his heart on it; he had at least a dozen letters from old Mr. Blair by him now on this subject; he would show them to Colonel Fleming if he liked.

Colonel Fleming would waive that; he was quite ready to take Mr. Bruce's word for it; but what, might he ask—what did Mr. Bruce imagine that he could do in the matter?



‘Why, urge it upon her, my dear sir, urge it upon her.’

‘I—what can I say? Surely you are the person—’

‘Not a bit of it, Colonel; not a bit of it. She doesn’t mind me more than an old woman. Now she has the greatest respect and reverence for you, I know very well; and affection too, I think.’

‘Yes, yes, very likely,’ interrupted Hugh hurriedly; ‘still I cannot see that anything I can say will make any difference to her.’

‘You have a great influence with her, I am sure you have; and besides you are the person to speak; it will come with authority from you. It is clearly your duty, Colonel Fleming, if you will excuse my saying so.’

‘Of course, of course, Bruce; say no more about it; but Miss Blair is not docile.’

‘Not at all, sir, not at all; and that reminds me. Do you know of any low attachment she is likely to have formed lately?’ asks Mr. Bruce, quite unconscious that the ‘undesirable person’ alluded to in Mrs. Blair’s letter, which by the way he carefully kept dark, was no other than Colonel Fleming himself.

‘Low attachment!’ repeated that gentleman in amazement, ‘certainly not; I never heard of such a thing, and should think it quite impossible; what can you have heard?’

‘Ah, well, I certainly did not think much of it myself, but rumours are always getting about, and will as long as she is unmarried; the girl should have a husband—nothing will really be right on the place till she is married.’

‘Still,’ objected the Colonel, ‘I do not

see that you can force her into marrying against her will.'

'Certainly not; but young women, my dear sir, as you and I know well, are very easy to influence. A few judicious words about duty and responsibility and so forth, and they come round as nicely as possible; they only want management.'

Colonel Fleming had his own views on the subject of whether young women were manageable or no, but he did not think it necessary to impart them to worthy little Mr. Bruce.

'I do not think,' he said, as he rose to go, 'that you will find that Miss Blair is a lady who will do violence to her feelings from any such motives.'

'Violence—no indeed, Colonel; but I did not think of any violence in the matter. Young Mr. Travers has been with me, and

from what he told me of their last interview I should be inclined to think—well, perhaps it might be a breach of confidence—but still as you are her guardian—'

'Tell me, by all means, Mr. Bruce,' said Colonel Fleming eagerly; 'what had she said to him?'

'Well, she had certainly given him a slight repulse, but Mr. Cecil Travers did not strike me as a hopeless lover at all; he seemed assured that with time and your assistance—in fact, my dear sir, as I said before, I believe the cause only wants a few judicious words from yourself to be won;' and Mr. Bruce rubbed his hands together and smiled at his visitor in the most satisfied and delighted manner.

Colonel Fleming gravely assured him that he would endeavour to do his duty to

Miss Blair in this, as in every other respect, and then took his leave.

He wandered westwards in the lowest possible spirits ; he dropped in at his tailor's and his banker's on the way, which did not take him very long, and then sauntered into the East India Club and ordered himself a solitary dinner. A few old friends nodded to him as he went in ; one asked him when he was going back to India, and he answered, with a sort of half groan, as soon as possible. On which Major-General Chutney—whose wife had come home hoping to cut a splash, which she found herself unable to do in a remote semi-detached stucco villa in Notting Hill, and who, consequently, led her lord along a pathway that was anything but bordered with roses—answered that he was quite right ; he only wished *he* could get

back there ; ' the old country is a mistake, Fleming, depend upon it, quite a mistake.'

And Hugh echoed his words gloomily, ' Yes, a mistake altogether ; how is your wife ? '

' Thanks, Mrs. Chutney is well, poor thing ; perhaps,' added the General insinuatingly, ' perhaps—ahem, as you are in town, you might look in upon her ; it would gratify her very much to see an old friend ! here is my card.'

Hugh took the card and promised to call on the lady if he had time, wondering vaguely as he did so in what possible way it could gratify her, whilst his friend departed with many internal chuckles at the stroke of policy he had achieved.

' Very clever that of me about the calling,' he said to himself, rubbing his hands gleefully

together ; ' she'll like that, I know ; shouldn't wonder if it kept her in a good temper for a week—shouldn't wonder a bit ! '

For Hugh Fleming happened to have a first cousin who was a lord ; a lord whose name was frequently to be seen in the ' Morning Post ' in connection with other much greater names than his own. And although this was a fact to which my hero himself seldom gave a thought, and which it may be said that he had almost forgotten, seeing that his cousin had never done anything for him, nor given him anything beyond occasionally his lordly hand to be shaken, and once, many years ago, a day's covert shooting in his preserves ; still the fact of his cousinship remained, and Major-General Chutney well knew that his better half was not at all oblivious of it. To be able to say in familiar converse with the ladies of her acquaintance,

‘Colonel Fleming called upon me to-day, such a dear fellow! an old friend of the General’s, and a first cousin of Lord So-and-so, you know, my dear, whose name I dare say you have often seen in the papers in attendance on His Royal Highness,’ would be certainly very gratifying indeed to the soul of Mrs. Major-General Chutney!

Left alone at the club, Hugh Fleming ate his dinner in moody silence, and wondered what on earth he should do with himself in town during the week he had said he should be away.

Truth to say, he had named that time for his absence, because he had thought it good both for himself and for her that he should be away as long as possible, and not at all because of the amount that he had to do.

In fact, he had hardly anything to do.



He was to see Mr. Bruce again the next day about the Dorsetshire farms; he had already visited his banker and his tailor; it was hardly possible that he should go more than once again to see these gentlemen. He went next day to see his only London relations, an uncle and aunt living in Cavendish Square, from whom he had not even any expectations, and who were almost more surprised than pleased at his visit; finally, he did actually, with a view to killing time, go and call on Mrs. Chutney, in which amusement he succeeded in expending the whole of one afternoon, as that good lady, with true Indian hospitality, insisted on having up a refreshment tray, although it was but three o'clock in the day, and forced him into the consumption, much against his will, of a large slice of seed cake and a glass of very bad sherry. Lastly, he had his hair cut, and wandered

up and down Bond Street and Pall Mall, aimlessly and miserably for the whole of one day ; and then he could stand it no longer. Two days short of the week he had promised to be away, he paid his hotel bill, packed up his portmanteau, drove to the station, and took his place in the midday express, which would bring him down at Sotherne in time for dinner, with an insane and perfectly unreasonable joy sadly unfitting his mature years and the general seriousness of his aspect.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE FIRST OF NOVEMBER.

It was on one of those days when Colonel Hugh Fleming was away up in London, that 'a southerly wind and a cloudy sky' ushered in the first of November.

Of all the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year the first day of November was to Squire Travers the most solemn and the most important.

The first meet of the season was held, according to a time-honoured custom, on a small triangular-shaped common surrounded by three cross roads, and having in the centre a fine group of elm trees, known by the name of Waneberry Green.

Here, by eleven o'clock in the morning on the eventful day, was gathered together half the county-side. There were eight or ten carriages full of ladies on the road by the side of the turf—Lady Ellison driving her little roan ponies with her daughter-in-law beside her; Mrs. Blair in sables and a Paris bonnet leaning back in the Sotherne barouche in solitary grandeur; fat, good-tempered old Mrs. Rollick, with her three plain but jolly daughters crammed up in the antiquated yellow family chariot, all four laughing and talking very loud indeed all at once, side by side with the Countess of Stiffly, very thin and angular, sitting bolt upright in her bran-new carriage, and casting withering glances of contempt and disgust at 'those horrible Rollick girls;' and many other representatives of the county families. Besides

these also were most of the smaller fry of the neighbourhood.

The parsons had come out to see the fun with their wives and daughters in unpretending little pony carriages, and the farmers' wives in wonderful and gorgeous colours driving themselves in their high tax carts.

And then there were a goodly company of riders. Ladies, of course, in any number, most of them having merely ridden over to see the meet and to flirt with the men, though some few have a more business-like air, and look as if they mean going by-and-by. Conspicuous among these latter is Juliet, on her three hundred guinea bay horse, side by side with Georgie Travers, on her old chesnut—Juliet, with her face flushed, rosy with the wind, and her beautiful figure shown off to full advantage by her perfectly fitting habit and by the splendid animal on which she is

mounted, looks as lovely a picture as anyone need wish to see, and is the centre of an admiring group of red-coated horsemen ; but Georgie is a little nervous and anxious, and keeps looking about for Wattie Ellison, who has not yet appeared.

The Squire, of course, is in great force, riding about from group to group, talking to the ladies in the carriages, waving his hand to this or that new-comer, consulting his watch every minute, and trotting rapidly up and down, as full of business as a general on the eve of a battle.

‘Isn’t your Wattie coming?’ asks Juliet aside of Georgie, for her woman’s wit has long ago guessed her little friend’s secret. ‘Ah, there he is, coming up to us now ; how well he looks in pink. How do you do, Mr. Ellison? here is Georgie getting quite pale

and anxious because you are so late !' and Juliet nods pleasantly as the two lovers, with smiles and blushes, take up their position at once side by side.

And now the clattering of hoofs is heard to the left, and headed by Ricketts the huntsman and backed up by the two whips, in a deep compact and mottled mass the pack of hounds comes trotting quickly on to the scene.

Then at once all is bustle and excitement. The Squire gives the word ; on go the hounds to draw the woods to the right—crack go the whips ; and with much hurry and commotion, the whole body of riders follow in the wake of the master. Then there is the usual waiting about at the covert side ; the gleam of red coats dotted about the field turns the grey background of brushwood and the sombre ploughed

field into a holiday scene ; all voices are hushed in the suppressed excitement of the moment, save only the Squire's, who swears roundly at everything and everybody within hearing, whilst the hounds draw silently but closely through the wood.

Then all at once a whimper is heard, soon deepening into a mellow chorus. 'Tally ho ! Gone away, gone away !'

In a moment the hounds have burst from the wood, and after them dash the whole company helter-skelter, as fast as their horses can lay legs to the ground.

Such a confusion at the first few fences ! Some refuse, some jump on each other, some make for the gates ; whilst the timid riders turn back, and those who are left with the first flight settle themselves down to their work in earnest and soon disappear over the shoulder of the hill.



In an incredibly short space of time Waneberry Green is deserted. The carriages have all driven off, some few to follow for a mile or two along the lane in hopes of coming across the hunt again, but most of them to turn in the direction of their respective homes. The lookers-on and followers on foot, who often see a good deal of the fun, have all disappeared; not a living soul is left; and the rooks, who have been disturbed from their haunts by the morning's noise and commotion, come cawing contentedly back to the elm trees in the middle of the little common.

They had a good run that morning, and foremost in the field was of course Georgie Travers, pressing close in her father's wake, and followed near by Wattie Ellison. Georgie knew every inch of the country, every gap, every gate, every ditch. She

picked her own line with a cool head and scientific reckoning; she knew better than to waste her own strength or her horse's at the beginning of the day with unnecessary exertions, but when there did come an unavoidable thickset bullfinch or a stiff bit of timber, Georgie put the chestnut's head well at it, rammed in her little spurred heel, set her teeth hard, and was over it in a manner that made every man near her look round for an instant to admire.

Juliet Blair did not ride to hounds after this fashion. I am not sure that she would not at heart have considered it rather *infra dig.* for the owner of Sotherne Court to go rushing over hedges and ditches during the whole day in the reckless way that little Georgie Travers did.

Juliet followed for a little way in a leisurely, ladylike manner, with her groom

in attendance, keeping rather aloof from the ruck of the hunt till they came to the first check, and then she turned her horse's head into a side lane, left the hounds behind, and went for a quiet ride on her own account.

Just when she was going home, and long after she thought she had left every trace of the hunt behind her, she suddenly came upon Georgie and young Ellison riding side by side down a narrow lane with their heads and hands suspiciously close together.

‘Hallo, Georgie ! I left you in front ; how did you come here ?’

‘I got thrown out !’ said Georgie, blushing, ‘and we have lost the hounds. Have you seen anything of them ?’

‘Nothing whatever, and I don’t suppose you want to see them again, you very disgraceful young people,’ said Juliet, laughing as she cantered by.

Georgie and her lover rode on slowly.

‘You will tell your father to-night, Georgie?’ said the young man.

‘Yes, I think I had better ; but papa has been very worried lately—by Cis.’

‘What has poor Cis been doing now?’

‘Why Juliet has refused him again,’ said Georgie, laughing.

‘I am sure I am not surprised. How can your father expect her to have him?’

‘Well, I don’t know ; but even now papa won’t give up the idea. He is very savage with Cis, and it is a good thing the poor boy is away. Certainly Cis inherits papa’s dogged determination, if he inherits nothing else, for he won’t give her up a bit. I rather like him for it. Oh, Wattie, Wattie,’ she cried suddenly, ‘there are the hounds—come along!’

And Georgie was over the hedge in a

minute, and away, as a gleam of scarlet and white through a break in the woodland told them that they had again fallen in with the hounds.

Such a run they had in the afternoon, thirty-five minutes without a check ; it quite eclipsed the little spurt of the morning.

It was very late that afternoon when Georgie and her father, stiff, tired, and muddy, dismounted at their own hall door, and limped into the house, whilst their steeds, looking tucked-up and draggled, were led away to their well-earned gruel.

Little Flora came flying downstairs three steps at a time to meet them.

‘ Have you killed a fox, papa—where is his head?’ she cried, clinging to her father’s muddy coat-tails.

Mrs. Travers, following slowly, lugubriously said it was a mercy they hadn’t

broken their necks this time, as if they were in the habit of doing so.

‘Oh, papa!’ cried little Flora, ‘do let me ride with you some day on Snowflake; I know I could go quite well without a leading-rein.’

‘So you shall, my little girl,’ said the Squire, lifting her up and kissing her. ‘I’ll make another Georgie of you some day, when she goes and marries and leaves her old daddy!’ and the old man winked and nodded at his eldest daughter in a manner that made her quite hopeful about the confession that was hanging over her.

‘Please go and take off your dirty things, Georgie, and make haste,’ said her mother. ‘Flora, you naughty child, you have covered your nice clean frock with mud—and I wish, Mr. Travers, you wouldn’t put such ideas in the child’s head. I am sure one daughter

‘Eh what, what! marriage, is it? Ah, my girl, I shan’t know how to part with you, but I won’t be selfish; never fear, my dear, the old man won’t be selfish. I won’t say nay to any good man who will make my little girl happy and keep her as well mounted as she deserves to be. Who is the man? Out with it, Georgie; who is the happy man?’

‘Oh, papa, I am afraid it isn’t at all a good match for me, not so good as you would like, but he is such a dear fellow, and I am so very fond of him.’

‘Well—out with it; who is he?’ said her father impatiently.

‘Wattie Ellison!’ faltered the girl, hanging down her head.

‘*What!*’ thundered the Squire, jumping up from his chair and turning round on her—whilst his best meerschaum pipe fell shattered at his feet.

‘*What!* how dare you mention that good-for-nothing young scoundrel to me—how dare you think of such a thing? Confound his impudence! So that’s what all your riding about together has come to, is it? I wouldn’t have believed it of you, Georgie; I wouldn’t have believed it!’

‘Oh, papa, don’t be so angry,’ cried Georgie, tearfully clasping her hands together; ‘indeed we couldn’t help loving each other.’

‘Loving! pack of nonsense. I am ashamed of you, Georgie. You don’t suppose any father in his senses would allow his daughter to marry an idle young pauper like that! How dare he lift his eyes to you, how dare he make love to you, that’s what I want to know. Of all the dishonourable, mean, base, contemptible young blackguards!’

‘Papa! papa!’ cried Georgie frantically.

‘Oh, aye, I mean what I say; and a good



horsewhipping is what Mr. Wattie Ellison deserves, and that's what I would like to give him; and kick him out of the house afterwards—impudent young scoundrel!’

And at this very moment the footman opened the door and in an impassive voice announced—

‘Mr. Walter Ellison.’

At this most unexpected and undesirable appearance on the scene of the young gentleman under discussion, poor Georgie went very nearly out of her mind with despair.

The Squire, speechless with fury, and almost foaming at the mouth, literally flew at the throat of his would-be son-in-law, and, seizing him by the collar of his coat, shook him like a terrier shakes a rat.

‘What d’ye mean by it—how dare you, you scoundrel—you d—d young rascal!’ he panted out breathlessly, whilst Georgie

rushed at him to defend her attacked lover.

‘I don’t see that I need be so dreadfully sworn at, sir,’ said Wattie, as soon as he was able to speak. ‘It is not my fault that your daughter is so charming that I could not help falling’ in love with her; and if you would allow us to be engaged we could wait, and I dare say I could get something to do, and you would help us a little, perhaps.’

‘I’ll see you d—d before ever I give you or her a farthing, sir—of that you may be sure; and as to allowing her to be engaged to you, I’d as soon allow her to be engaged to Mike the earth-stopper, quite as soon—much sooner, in fact.’

‘Hush, hush, papa!’ here broke in Georgie with a very white face. ‘You need not say any more. You will be sorry for having spoken like this by-and-by.’

‘I shan’t be a bit sorry ; I mean every word I say. When this young gentleman goes out of the house this evening I forbid him ever to come into it again. I forbid you ever to speak to him or write to him or hold any communication with him whatever. If you do I will disown you for my daughter, and never speak to you again ; and I tell you, Georgie, that sooner than see you married, or even engaged to such an idle, profitless, good-for-nothing as this young man, I would rather by far see you in your coffin.’

There were a few moments’ silence in the little room when the Squire finished speaking, and then Georgie, white to her very lips, but brave and resolute as the little woman always was where courage and resolution were wanted, went straight up to her lover.

‘You hear what papa says, Wattie; don’t stop here any longer. It is no use; he will never allow it. We must just make the best of it and submit. He is my father, and I wouldn’t disobey him for worlds. You had better go right away, my poor boy, and try and forget me—yes, don’t shake your head, Wattie; if it’s impossible, we shall perhaps learn with time and with absence to get over it. Oh, Wattie, give me one kiss, and say goodbye!’ and she put up both her arms round her lover’s neck, and kissed and clung to him sobbing; whilst her father stood by looking on but saying never a word, with a sort of choke in his throat of which he felt half ashamed.

‘Good-bye, my love—God bless you, Wattie. As long as you are alive I will never marry any other man on earth. Go now,’ and she pushed him with her own

hands gently out of the room, and closed the door upon him.

‘My own brave, good girl!’ said the Squire when he was gone, attempting to draw his daughter into his arms; but Georgie shrank away from him.

‘Don’t touch me—don’t speak to me!’ she said, and then sat down till she heard the front door close with a slam, and Wattie’s footsteps die away on the gravel walk outside.

Then she got up and moved rather unsteadily towards the door. The Squire sprang forward and held it open for her, looking at her wistfully, almost entreatingly, as she passed out; but she fixed her eyes in front of her and did not look at him.

And somehow, when she was gone, and he was left alone, although his daughter had given up her lover and promised to obey

him, and although he had sworn his fill at the young fellow and had not even been answered again, the old man did not feel very triumphant; he did not seem to have had the best of it at all in the encounter that was just over, but rather very much the worst of it. He had a vague idea that he had taken an inglorious part altogether, and felt rather small and contemptible in his own eyes.

‘Nonsense, nonsense!’ he said to himself at last. ‘Of course I was quite right—quite right. Any father in my place would have done the same—impudent young scoundrel! And how was I to know the girl would take it in that meek way—girls don’t generally. I didn’t like the look in her face, though, when she went out; I hope it won’t make any difference between her and me, Oh, she’ll get over it fast enough! I think

I'll give her a new saddle ; she wants one badly. Yes, I'll do that for her ; that will please her, I know.'

And no sooner had this brilliant idea come into his mind than he sat down and wrote to his saddler in London to send down as soon as possible a new lady's saddle of the very best that money could buy.

When he had directed and stamped this letter and dropped it into the letter-box outside in the hall, he felt happier in his mind, and went upstairs and joined the rest of his family in the drawing-room ; but Georgie was not there.

No word was said between Georgie and her father of what had passed between them, either the next day or on any of the days that followed. The girl went about her duties as usual, but very quietly and unobtrusively. She wrote her father's letters, and read the

papers to him, and walked up to the stables and kennels with him as she was always accustomed to do ; but silently, listlessly, without any of her natural energy and enthusiasm. You could see there was no longer any pleasure or spirit in her life for her. She was not in the least sulky ; she was perfectly sweet, and gentle, and submissive to her father ; and when the new saddle came down she showed as much affectionate gratitude to him as he could possibly have expected, and yet everything was different !

There was no longer that unity in thought and purpose—that perfect confidence that had always bound the two together in a tie that resembled a devoted friendship rather than the relation which father and daughter generally bear to each other.

The next hunting day Georgie, much to her father's relief, for he had been dread-



fully afraid that she might refuse to go out, appeared at breakfast as usual in her habit. She rode the new brown mare, who, although she fidgeted a good deal at starting, and lashed out once or twice at the covert side in an unpleasant-looking way, still when she was once fairly going, certainly acquitted herself as if she knew her business.

Wattie Ellison was not there, and Georgie and her father both overheard Sir George Ellison say, in answer to some enquiries after him, that his nephew had taken a fit of industry and gone to town to court fortune in his old chambers in the Temple.

To Juliet Blair the girl said a few words concerning her trouble. Juliet saw at once that something had gone wrong with her little friend.

‘What has happened, Georgie?’ she asked, in a whisper, as the two found them-

selves side by side during a check in a deep lane. 'You look so miserable.'

'I *am* miserable, Juliet,' answered the girl, and her lip quivered. 'It is all over between me and Wattie; he has gone away. Papa won't hear of it; he was very angry.'

'What a shame! Why should he be angry? I am sure Wattie is a man anybody might be proud of!'

'Thanks, Juliet dear, but papa was quite right,' answered Georgie, loyal as ever to her father. 'I knew he would not allow it; you see Wattie has no money, and no prospects whatever; one's sense tells one it was impossible.'

'How I wish I could help you!' cried Juliet, ever ready for a generous action. 'Now, don't you think I could make you a good fat allowance, just to start you in life,

you know? You wouldn't be proud, I know, for after all, half the use of money is that now and then one can make somebody one cares for happy—don't you think we could manage it?'

'I am afraid not, you dear good Juliet! Not that I should be proud a bit, but you see papa would not hear of such a thing, nor Wattie either; that is the worst of these men!' added Georgie with a sigh.

'What, not even if I was your sister-in-law?' said Juliet, laughing.

'Ah yes, then, perhaps. Oh dear, Juliet, how I wish you could manage to marry Cis! Papa would be so pleased. Poor papa, it is hard on him that both his children give him so much trouble and anxiety in their love affairs!' At this instant a halloo was heard, and Juliet, who was going home,

waved her hand in farewell to her friend,  
who put the brown mare neatly over a stile,  
and galloped off across a grass field to join  
the hounds.

## CHAPTER IX.

## COLONEL FLEMING ADVISES HIS WARD.

‘I WONDER when he will come back,’ said Juliet to herself, as she rode slowly up to her own hall door.

‘Not till the day after to-morrow, I suppose.’ It still wanted two days of the week he had said he would be away, and Juliet, as she dismounted and went in, felt that she had never known a week to be so interminably long as this one had been.

She went into the little morning-room. The short winter afternoon was drawing in, and the room was but dimly lighted by the flicker of the firelight.

‘Let us have some tea,’ said Juliet, flinging down her hat and gloves on the table and ringing the bell, and then she stooped down in front of the fire and began warming her hands.

Somebody rose from the sofa in the half light and came and stood behind her on the hearth-rug. She thought it was her step-mother.

‘I am very cold,’ she said.

‘Are you?’ said a voice that was certainly not Mrs. Blair’s.

She jumped up with a glad cry of surprise.

‘Hugh!’ she exclaimed in her delight, unconsciously calling him by his christian name for the first time, and holding out both her hands to him; and he took the hands and held them tight in his own, and then, with an impulse which he was unable to

resist, drew her suddenly towards him and kissed her once on the forehead.

Ah ! how many days were to pass away ere ever his lips repeated that unexpected and all too deliciously sweet caress !

‘ You are glad to see me again, then ? ’ he asked, as Juliet drew back from him a little confusedly.

‘ Very glad, ’ she answered, looking away from him with brightly crimsoned cheeks. ‘ I had no idea you were here. What brought you back sooner than you expected ? ’

‘ The three-thirty express—my business was over ; there was no longer any reason for my staying away. ’

And then Higgs and the footman came in with the tea-tray and the candles, followed almost immediately by the rustle of Mrs. Blair’s silk dress along the passage.

‘Why, Colonel Fleming!’ exclaimed that lady, ‘when did you come back? I never heard you arrive! why, how quickly you have done all your business; how much more lively I should have thought it must be for a man to be up in dear delightful London, with all the clubs, and Bond Street and the shops, and the theatres, than down in the wilds of the country with only two women to amuse him—shouldn’t you have thought so, Juliet?’

‘You underrate your own fascinations, Mrs. Blair!’ said Hugh, with a gallant bow, whilst Juliet, still thrilling from head to foot with the memory of that kiss, busied herself silently at the tea-table.

About that same kiss, Hugh Fleming took himself afterwards very seriously to task. It was not at all in the programme of grave coldness and guardian-like severity



of demeanour which he had drawn out for himself, and was quite incompatible with that stern line of duty and high principle to which he had determined most strictly to adhere. It was wonderful how, at the first sight of that graceful girl, with her small dark head and soul-inflaming eyes, all these good resolutions had melted and vanished away, and left him so weak that he had not been able to resist even the small temptation of kissing her.

It was only by going over and over again all the old arguments of honour and duty and right feeling during the course of a somewhat restless and sleepless night, that Hugh Fleming could at all bring himself round again to the very proper determination which Mr. Bruce's arguments and his own conscience had succeeded in implanting deeply in his mind.

He must do this hard duty by her; he must plead his rival's cause; he must if possible persuade her to look more favourably on Cis Travers' suit, and then he had better get himself back to India as quickly as he could; for to stop by and see her married to another under his eyes was surely a pitch of self-torture and self-abnegation which could not possibly be required of him.

'Will you come out and take a turn in the garden with me, Juliet?' he asked of her, as they rose from breakfast the next morning; 'it is a nice bright day for a stroll, and I have something to say to you.'

Juliet gladly consented and went to fetch her hat.

They wandered out together towards the shrubberies, talking lightly first of one thing, then of another; Hugh, like a coward, de-

laying the evil moment as long as possible. Did he guess, perhaps, how rudely his hand was to tear away all her brightest dreams?

At last there was a sudden pause in their talk, and Hugh began hesitatingly :

‘I said I had something to say to you—’

‘Yes?’ she said enquiringly, breaking off a little branch of crimson-berried yew from the hedge along which they were walking.

‘It is perhaps a difficult subject for me to broach to you, Juliet, and one which I can hardly hope you will listen to from me, but it has been forced upon my conviction of late that it is perhaps my duty to speak to you very plainly indeed upon this matter.’

‘Why should you not speak plainly to me?’ she answered, looking down at the red berries in her hand, and fingering them nervously.

‘It is the matter of your marriage,’ he said gravely.

And then she answered, with, poor girl! heaven knows what a beating heart, and with all the hopes and fears of a glad love trembling in her low broken voice, ‘Speak to me as plainly as you will; speak to me from your heart, Colonel Fleming, not as guardian to ward, but as man to woman; that is how I shall like you best to speak.’ In a moment it had flashed across her that because she was rich and he was poor, because he was her guardian and she his ward, therefore it was that he hesitated to speak what was in his heart towards her.

‘Unfortunately, my dear Juliet,’ he answered, after a moment’s silence, during which every demon that understands the art of temptation had fought a pitched battle with him, and been defeated, ‘unfortunately,

it is exactly as a guardian to a ward that I wish to speak to you. I think you have hardly given the subject of a marriage with Cecil Travers as much attention and consideration as the idea demands from you.'

The crimson berries dropped from her nerveless fingers upon the path, and every vestige of colour faded from her face.

Colonel Fleming went on, speaking rather rapidly :

'I had no idea until lately how very much your poor father's heart was set upon it, and how completely the match was of his own planning and arranging for you.'

No answer, only Juliet walked on rather faster by his side.

'Cecil Travers is certainly a most steady and deserving young fellow, and is, as I need not remind you, very much attached to you ; he is, I am sure, quite above any sordid considerations, and will value you for yourself,

and not for your money, as so many of the men you will meet in the world might do. Don't you agree with me ?'

Still no answer ; Miss Blair walks rapidly on.

'From what Mr. Bruce tells me,' continued Colonel Fleming, 'and from what, indeed, I know myself of your affairs, it would be certainly a great advantage for the two properties to be united ; it appears that the whole of those outlying farms in the Lyne-dale valley, which now form part of Mr. Travers' property, did in point of fact actually belong to your great-grandfather, who sold them very much beneath their value to the Travers' family, in order to pay the debts of a younger son. Now, such a proceeding was of course an iniquity, and if you can in any way repair and make up for the sins of your ancestors by restoring the property to its

original fair dimensions, it is no doubt incumbent upon you to do so.—*Noblesse oblige*, my dear Juliet; in your position of responsibility you are not quite the free agent which young ladies are generally supposed to be in these matters, and you owe a certain distinct duty, not only to your predecessors, but also, if I may be allowed to say so, to those that are to come after you.'

Then Colonel Fleming comes perforce to an end of his arguments, having, in fact, nothing more to urge.

'You are well primed, Colonel Fleming!' cries Juliet sarcastically. 'Mr. Bruce has supplied you with the usual stereotyped sentences. I have heard all that you have been saying a great many times before,' and she laughed a short, dry, and not pleasant laugh.

'I don't know, if the things are true, that they are any the worse for having been

said before,' says her guardian, almost humbly.

And then Juliet stops short in her walk and turns upon him with angry, flashing eyes.

'And do you mean to say, Colonel Fleming, that you, of all people on earth, advise me to marry Cecil Travers?'

'Really, Juliet,' he begins hesitatingly, quailing somewhat before her righteous wrath.

'Answer me!' she cried, stamping her foot. 'Do you wish me to marry Cecil Travers? Yes, or no. Answer me!'

'And Hugh, not daring for his own sake to answer her no, replies—

'Yes.'

'May God forgive you for that lie!' answers Juliet, and deliberately turns her back upon him, and walks away into the house.



Things after that are very uncomfortable indeed at Sotherne Court for several days. Juliet is deeply, bitterly offended with her guardian, and will not speak to him more than she can possibly avoid.

That he should have spoken to her as he did, ignoring all that had passed between them of tender meaning and unspoken sympathy, was in itself a bitter source of grief to her; but that he should have deliberately insulted her by pleading the cause of his rival is a thing which Juliet thinks, and perhaps thinks rightly, that no woman ought ever wholly to forgive to the man whom she loves.

By some mysterious means of her own, whether it is by letters from Mr. Bruce, or whether Ernestine's powers of observation have again been called into requisition, I am not prepared to say, but certain it is that

Mrs. Blair is conscious not only of the coolness that exists between Juliet and her guardian, but also is perfectly aware of the cause for that coolness; and this state of things affords her intense satisfaction.

Mrs. Blair, as has probably been seen long ago, divined that the interest which Colonel Fleming took in Juliet exceeded that amount of interest which a guardian may legitimately feel for a young lady who is in the position of his ward.

It seemed to Mrs. Blair that, given a man with no private fortune, and in a position of great intimacy in the house of a young lady largely gifted with all the good things of this world—what more natural than that the poor man should do his best to gain possession of those good things.

Now, that Colonel Fleming should marry her stepdaughter would not at all have suited

Mrs. Blair's views for her own future arrangements.

Colonel Fleming was not a man over whom Mrs. Blair felt she could obtain the smallest influence ; she knew instinctively that he disliked and mistrusted her, and as Juliet did the same, anything like an understanding between the two would probably be at once the signal for her own departure from the very comfortable quarters in which she was at present installed. Although, with a weak youth like Cecil Travers, the widow felt that things would probably be very different, still I am not sure that to put Cecil prominently in the foreground, in order to keep other and more formidable rivals at bay, was not altogether perhaps more her object than to urge on a marriage either with him or with anyone else. She felt that, if she could get Colonel Fleming safely back to India

without his having proposed to Juliet, she would have gained a great deal.

Unconsciously, honest little Mr. Bruce, whose faith in the claims of the 'Travers alliance' was part of his creed with reference to Miss Blair, played into the widow's hands with a promptitude and an unsuspectingness for which she was constantly invoking blessings on his worthy head. And she had yet another advocate—of which, however, she was quite unaware—in the scrupulous feelings of honour and delicacy which formed a part of Colonel Fleming's character. Instead of being a fortune-hunter, as in her own mind Mrs. Blair had designated him, he was, on the contrary, ready to sacrifice not only his own happiness, but also Juliet's, if need be, sooner than in any way to court a woman whose wealth was to him only a disadvantage, and not in the very least a temptation.

After that conversation in the garden in which Colonel Fleming had given his advice so very ineffectually to his ward, his manner to her became entirely changed ; he was continually on his guard with her, constantly watching his own words and actions, so that he became reserved, and even cold and distant to her.

Juliet fretted vainly over this change. To her impulsive, affectionate nature such an alteration in one who had hitherto been uniformly kind and indulgent to her was inexpressibly painful.

Her own resentment against him had been but short-lived ; and had he but met her half-way she would have been only too glad to have forgotten all that he had said, and have let everything be as usual between them.

Things were in this state when a dinner-

party, which had been for some time in contemplation, took place at Sotherne Court.

Sir George and Lady Ellison, Mr. and Mrs. Travers, and Georgie, and the Rollick family were among the guests.

A country dinner-party is not, as a rule, a lively entertainment; the conversation is purely of local topics, and to a stranger the ins-and-outs of county gossip are apt to be inexpressibly wearisome.

It is bad enough at dinner, but after dinner, in the drawing-room, when the ladies are alone, it is ten times worse.

Lady Ellison gets hold of a young married woman, to whom she proceeds to unfold her views on the nourishment of very young infants. Mrs. Blair descants on the superiority of French ladies'-maids to Mrs. Travers, who thanks God piously that *she* never had a fine ladies'-maid at all, either

French or English! And presently two of the Miss Rollicks good-naturedly go to the piano and warble a duet.

‘Oh! were I on the zephyr’s wing!’ trill out these substantial maidens together, which makes Georgie Travers wickedly whisper that, if they were, they would tumble down very speedily; Mrs. Rollick sits by fanning her portly person placidly and smiling sweetly at her offspring, whilst Juliet and Georgie whisper together in a corner about Wattie.

‘My dear,’ says Mrs. Rollick, who has a knack of making awkward remarks, nodding pleasantly across to Juliet, ‘My dear, how long is that very good-looking guardian of yours going to stay here?’

Juliet is angry with herself for getting red as she answers—

‘As long as I can keep him here, I hope.’

‘Ah!’ says the good lady, nodding and winking, ‘if I were you I would try and keep him altogether; perhaps that is what you mean to do, eh?’

Here Mrs. Blair remarks casually, ‘I believe that Colonel Fleming’s leave is nearly over, Mrs. Rollick; he will be returning to India almost immediately, I fancy.’

And for once, although she hates her for saying it, Juliet feels grateful to her step-mother.

She gets up and goes over to the Miss Rollicks, who have just ended their duet, and asks them to sing another, which they eagerly and joyfully proceed to do.

‘I know a maiden fair to see!’ said Miss Arabella Rollick, archly smiling round on the company generally.

‘Beware! take care!’ echoes Miss



Eleanor Rollick, in a deep lugubrious contralto.

‘She’s fooling thee!’ continues Miss Arabella, confidentially winking down the room.

And then there is a commotion at the door, all the gentlemen come in very close together, turn round just inside the room, and go on with what they were talking about before they came in.

Lady Ellison and the young married woman hastily push their chairs apart and finish off their last confidences on the subject of the infants in a whisper.

The Squire has button-holed Sir George Ellison in the doorway, and is saying, in a loud voice—

‘Unless we can improve our breed of horses, sir, unless we can improve the breed, the country *must* go to the dogs!’

‘Ah, we must improve the breed of dogs, then—ha! ha!’ says Sir George, with a feeble attempt at a mild joke, and endeavouring to sidle away from his tormentor and to get into the middle of the room—a stratagem which the Squire immediately circumvents by backing in front of him, holding him tight by the arm, and talking at the top of his voice.

Mr. Rollick, who is very small and thin, and altogether gives one the idea of a man much sat upon by the females of his family, is telling the young married woman’s husband, who is a curate, for the third time that the crop of mangel wurzels was remarkably fine this year—re-markably fine. The curate, whose interest in that vegetable is not absorbing, answers rather irrelevantly,

‘Exactly so!’ and looks round the room to see if his wife is sitting in a draught, which

is always his prevailing anxiety in life. Two young officers, who have come over from the neighbouring garrison town, stand for a moment together, and ejaculate to each other, 'Deuced good sherry!' and 'Deuced fine gal!' the latter remark being pointed at Juliet; and then the Rollick girls, having come successfully to the end of 'Beware,' bear down upon these two gentlemen from the opposite side of the room and carry them off in triumph into separate corners, there to torment them at leisure.

Lastly, Hugh Fleming saunters into the room, looking very much bored, glances for one moment at Juliet, and then sinks down into a low chair by the side of Georgie Travers, to whom he has taken rather a fancy.

Squire Travers having backed himself

into the middle of the room, still discoursing noisily by the way upon the breed of horses, catches his foot in the folds of Mrs. Rollick's amber-satin gown, among which he flounders about hopelessly, and nearly tumbles headlong on to that portly lady's lap.

Juliet goes laughingly to his rescue, and then, with a view to the release of the much-enduring baronet, carries him off to a distant sofa 'for a talk.'

The Squire is pleased with the attention; he is very fond of Juliet, and always looks upon her in the light of his future daughter-in-law.

'My little Georgie looks well, doesn't she?' he says, looking across to his daughter.

'Not at all, Mr. Travers,' answers Juliet remorsefully; 'I never saw her look less well;

she looks as white and ill as possible ; I am afraid you have been giving her something to fret about lately.'

'Eh, eh, what ! what's the girl been grumbling about ? You don't really think she looks ill, do you, Miss Juliet ?' This is said anxiously ; and Juliet answers that she really does think so, and the Squire scratches his thin grey hair in great perturbation.

'God bless my soul !' he says ruefully, 'I can't let her go and marry a young pauper without a farthing, you know !'

'No, but you might give her a little hope,' pleads Juliet.

'Well, and are you going to give me a little hope about my boy ?' says he, dexterously turning the tables on her ; 'answer me that, Miss Juliet, and then I'll see what I can do for Georgie—not before, mind, not

before!' and the argument is so unanswerable that Juliet is not able to continue the discussion.

And then, to everybody's relief, Lady Ellison's carriage is announced, and there is a general move; everyone saying, as they wish good-night, what a pleasant evening they have spent, and no one honestly thinking so, except the Rollick girls, who have made great way with the two officers, and got them to promise to come over to lunch next Sunday.

The last of the carriages drives off, and as Mrs. Blair goes up to bed, Juliet lingers a moment in the hall, and presently Colonel Fleming comes out to her; she lifts her eyes to his with a sort of dumb entreaty for mercy.

'Are you still angry with me?' she asks gently.

‘Angry! what can you be thinking of? how could I be angry with you?’ Something makes him more than half inclined to take her into his arms then and there, but he resists the temptation, and only says, half playfully, half tenderly—

‘Go to bed, child, and don’t take such silly ideas into your head!’

And Juliet sprang upstairs with a blither step and with a lighter heart than she had had for some days.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE 'MELODIOUS MINSTRELS.'

WHEN Cecil Travers had met with that rebuff from the lady of his affections which has been recorded in a previous chapter, he had not been at all sorry to carry out her parting injunctions.

Broadley House became, so to speak, uninhabitable for Squire Travers' only son, and Squire Travers himself had taken care to make it so. During the two days that he had remained at home after having been refused by Juliet, Cis ardently wished himself anywhere but under the paternal roof.



His father sneered and scoffed at him all day long.

He wasn't surprised that no sensible girl would have him ; he shouldn't wonder if he hadn't had the pluck to ask her right out ; he supposed he went whining and whimpering to her like a school-girl instead of speaking up to her like a man ; girls, especially spirited, clever girls, like Juliet, couldn't abide mollycoddles—and so on, till Cis very nearly lost his temper, and it was a pity that he didn't quite do so, for his father would have respected him ten times more if he had.

Finally, Cis having declared that he was not at all hopeless of eventual success, his father answered that it was like his vanity to say so, but that he was very glad to hear it, for he intended to see Juliet Blair his daughter-in-law before he died ; and that, if Cis stuck to her like a man, and asked her

often enough, she was quite certain to give in at last.

The upshot of it was that old Mr. Travers gave his son a liberal cheque, and told him to go up to London, away from his mollycod-dling mother, and see if he couldn't get a little sense into his head and see a little life.

Cis accordingly, feeling very much like the prodigal son, pocketed his cheque, and, nothing loth to escape from the storms of home life, went his way up to London.

There, as has been seen, he visited Mr. Bruce, took that gentleman considerably into his confidence, and felt very much cheered and consoled by the very hopeful view which he took of his prospects, and also by the eager partisanship for his cause evinced by the worthy solicitor.

Mr. Bruce, like Mr. Travers senior, was of opinion that perseverance was the main

thing required, and that, if the young lady was but asked often enough, she was certain to yield at the end.

Only of course time must be given.

‘Take your time, my dear Mr. Cecil,’ he said assuringly; ‘take your time; ladies never like being hurried. A little management is all that is required, and plenty of time,’ and Cis, as he wished him good-bye, felt almost triumphant already.

Cis, left to his own resources in London, was not nearly so much a fish out of water as he was in his own home. He belonged to a young University Club, in its first stages, and here he was sure to meet plenty of his friends—men of his own college and of his own standing, who did not know nor care that he could not sit on a horse, but who did know and were mindful of that first in ‘mods.’ of which his own father had spoken

so disparagingly, and amongst whom he had in consequence some reputation for talent.

These young gentlemen, whose whiskers, like Cecil's own, were small, and whose heads were for the most part filled with inordinate vanity, coated over with a thin layer of information, nevertheless counted themselves among the rising minds of their time.

When they met together they discoursed eagerly upon the principal religious and political subjects of the day, and honestly believed that their opinions were altogether new and original, and were destined to exercise a great and lasting influence on the history of their country.

Amongst these young men Cis found himself quite an authority. Instead of being snubbed, sneered at, and sat upon from morning till night, his opinion was asked, and he was attentively listened to when he gave it.

He made little speeches, and they were enthusiastically cheered; and altogether he was conscious of being considered by his little clique to be a very clever and rising young man. So true is it that a prophet hath no honour in his own country!

All his friends were not, however, of the same stamp. One day, as he was wandering idly down Piccadilly, staring in at the shop windows, a tall young fellow, in loose ill-made clothes, and with a ragged red beard, stopped suddenly before him, exclaiming—

‘Surely, you must be little Cis Travers!’

‘So I am, at your service—and you? Why, it’s David Anderson! we haven’t met since we left school—fancy your remembering me!’

‘I should have known you anywhere. What are you doing in town—nothing? You must come to my diggings. Won’t

you? what are you going to do to-night? Nothing particular—I thought so; well, then, you must positively come to our meeting. We hold our weekly meeting to-night.'

'Who are *we*?' asked Cis.

'Why, the "Melodious Minstrels," our musical society, you know. Of course you are fond of music?'

'Ye—s, I suppose so,' said Cis doubtfully, recollecting that he was rather fond of listening to Juliet's singing.

'Yes, of course you are, everyone with a soul loves music. Well, then, I can promise you a treat to-night; none of your trash, I promise you—real, good, first-class—the music of the future, you know, Wagner, and Beethoven, and Schumann too. Here's the address,' giving him a card on which was inscribed—'Herr Franz Rudenbach, 114 Blandford Street.'

‘But, my dear Anderson,’ objected Cis, ‘how on earth can I go to this place, and who is Herr Rudenbach?’

‘Oh, he’s our conductor and fiddler, you know, and with *such* a daughter! perfectly lovely! plays like an angel! You’d come for the daughter if you knew what she was like, I can tell you!’ And Mr. David Anderson lifted up his hands and eyes, smacked his lips, and went through other gymnastic exercises indicative of his extreme admiration of the lady in question.

‘You must come, you know, Cis; you’ll be delighted. Nine o’clock sharp, mind; be sure you come. Good-bye,’ and Mr. Anderson bolted swiftly round the corner of the street.

Cis felt very dubious about the evening’s entertainment; but, when the time came, partly moved by curiosity concerning the

fair Miss Rudenbach, and partly through a wish to please his old schoolfellow, he found himself, a little after nine o'clock, at the indicated house in Blandford Street.

As he went up the narrow stairs of the dingy little house, a strange Babel of sounds met his ear. Scrapings of violins, too-too-ings of cornets, mixed with noises the like of which he had never heard before, made him imagine that a farmyard had been let loose in the room above him.

As he reached the top step a guttural German voice cried out—

‘Now then, gentlemen. One, two, three, four—off!’ And the performers started.

It was Beethoven's toy symphony. And anyone who remembers his impressions on hearing this performance for the first time will understand the absolute amazement with which Cis Travers, to whom it was



a complete novelty, listened at the doorway.

He thought at first that he had stumbled on a company of lunatics. Ten young men were grouped around the piano, each armed with a different so-called 'instrument.' One had a child's drum, another a penny trumpet, another a whistle, one had a row of bells on a stick, another a sort of tambourine; but the most awful instrument of all was a small box, exactly like the stand of a child's toy dog, which when pressed emitted two sharp, short, deafening squeaks, supposed to imitate the note of the cuckoo.

When all these varied instruments burst into play at once, with doubtful tune and most uncertain time, the effect was simply Pandemonium. Herr Rudenbach stood in the midst, with his bâton, and shouted 'Time, time!' at every bar, whilst his daughter

Gretchen slaved away at the piano. Innocent, blue-eyed Gretchen, with her calm sweet face, and her smooth brown Madonna-like head! Cis Travers could not but acknowledge that David Anderson had shown his good taste in admiring her. She looked so out of place, so superior to her surroundings, like some garden flower grown up by chance in a field of weeds.

Wonders were never to cease that evening. Looking round the room towards the six or eight young men who composed the audience, Cis was astonished to recognise Wattie Ellison lounging back in an arm-chair and sketching Gretchen's profile in his pocket-book.

David Anderson, who was gravely playing the tambourine—indeed the intense gravity of all the performers struck Cis at once as something very ludicrous, considering the

ridiculous childishness of the instruments on which they were performing. David nodded at Cis over the top of his music, and went on with his playing, and Cis sidled up to Wattie.

‘Are they all mad, Wattie? and how on earth do you come here?’ he whispered.

‘I might ask the same,’ answered Wattie in the same tone. ‘Aren’t they idiots? But it is very amusing, and little Gretchen’s face is perfect. I am going to paint an historical picture, I don’t know quite what the subject is to be; I haven’t settled—either the massacre of St. Bartholomew, or the burning of Joan of Arc, or something of that kind. I think I shall make something of it, and I want Gretchen’s face for one of my figures. That is what I am here for; I am studying it; it’s miserable work losing all the hunting season at this sort of thing, isn’t it? How are your people, Cis?’

Here the toy symphony came providentially to an end, and David Anderson came up to speak to his old schoolfellow, and introduced him to Herr Rudenbach, who bowed and smirked upon him with exaggerated humility, whilst Gretchen came forward in her grey stuff dress, made high up to her neck, and spoke a few gentle words to him.

Then two young gentlemen played a duet on two violins, which was really a very creditable performance, and was boisterously clapped and vociferously encored by the rest of the community ; after which a most unpretending little tray of refreshments was brought in and handed round—lemonade and gin and water, the latter beverage being generally preferred ; slices of pound-cake, and dry untempting-looking sandwiches from the ham and beef shop round the corner, which

were nevertheless partaken of with avidity by the guests.

‘Come home to my rooms, Cis,’ said Wattie Ellison when, having feasted upon the above-named refreshments, the little society prepared to break up ; and, linking his arm within that of Georgie’s brother, he carried him off with him to the Temple.

But that was by no means the last of Cis Travers’s visits to the house in Blandford Street, nor to the meetings of the ‘Melodious Minstrels.’

Partly through sheer idleness, partly through a certain pleasure in playing the great man among a set of men who, being chiefly city clerks or else embryo solicitors, looked up to him as to a superior order of being, Cis grew rather fond of dropping in during these weekly musical performances.

And little Gretchen got to look for his

coming. With the instinct of true refinement, she learnt at once to distinguish him and his friend Wattie Ellison from the other young men, of David Anderson's stamp, who came to her father's rooms. Cis was kind to her, and took pains to talk to her and to be interested in her. And he was to her as a god.

It was very pleasant to him to be so regarded. In the present sore and wounded state of his heart and feelings, consequent upon his rejection by Juliet Blair, it was inexpressibly soothing to him to be worshipped and waited upon by any woman so young and so pretty as Gretchen Rudenbach. This girl did not snub him, nor laugh at him, nor pity him with irritating compassion, nor call him 'poor Cis' to his face, as if he was an inferior being. She sat and gazed at him in speechless worship, or spoke to him, in low

timid tones, of her daily life, and cast adoring, respectful looks at him when he talked to her or gave her advice, in a manner which no young fellow could possibly fail to find excessively flattering, he was grateful to her for her devotion, and began in return to pay her many little attentions. He brought her flowers and poetry books, and copied out music for her ; once or twice he called at the house in the morning and found her at home ; and, having one day met her accidentally in the street, on her way to give a music lesson to two little girls, where she went three times a week, Master Cis carefully ascertained the exact route which she invariably followed on her way thither, and then found that, by some extraordinary coincidence, he was always turning up at unexpected corners of the street just at the moment when the little

quietly-dressed music teacher appeared in sight.

Gretchen began to confide her little troubles and experiences to this kind-mannered young gentleman.

She told him that her father was not very kind to her, and that she was not at all happy in her home. Her mother, she said, had been a real lady—an English girl, who had run away with her father from the school at which he had been music teacher. As long as her mother lived, although she was a very unhappy woman, in very bad health, little Gretchen had been still not altogether uncared-for and unloved, but since her death the poor child had had but a troublous life of it with her father. From what she told him, Cis gathered that Herr Rudenbach, although he spoke kindly to his daughter before others, was rough and harsh to her



when they were alone. He was avaricious and greedy of gain, looking upon his child and her talent for music solely as a means whereby he might make money out of her, of which he gave her hardly enough to clothe herself, whilst he himself spent every farthing that he could lay hands on upon his own selfish and not very respectable pleasures.

Gretchen also confided to Cis that David Anderson was anxious to marry her, and owned to him that, although she did not care for him in the least, she was half ready to do so in order to escape from the unhappiness which she endured at home.

But here Cis became quite eloquent in his remonstrances and admonitions. It was, he declared, the greatest sin a woman could be guilty of to marry a man she did not love. How could she possibly hope for a blessing on a union entered into from so unhallowed

a motive? She must not dream of marrying David Anderson—it would be an absolute wickedness! She must promise him solemnly never to consent to become the wife of a man she did not love, and who was so utterly unsuited to her as honest David.

And Gretchen tearfully, timidly, and blushingly gave the required promise; and heaven knows what wild impossible hopes dawned in the poor child's heart as she did so!

Cecil Travers was doing her a dreadful and incalculable injury. He was not in the smallest degree in love with her. Was he not as much in love with Juliet as it was possible for a man to be? He did not want little Gretchen for himself, but he did distinctly object to David Anderson's having her. Men are very frequently found to resemble

closely the typical dog in the manger of the well-known fable.

And women are very slow to see this ; they cannot understand a man being full of jealous objections to another man from any motive save one. Gretchen fancied (and who shall say she was to blame?) that because Cis was hotly, unreasonably indignant against David Anderson for wanting to marry her, therefore he must necessarily be desirous of doing so himself—whereas, as we know very well, nothing was farther from Cis Travers's thoughts than such a *mésalliance*.

David Anderson, although he had been educated at the same country-town school where Cis Travers had been sent for two years before going to Eton, was not exactly in the same rank of life as our young friend. He was the son of a most worthy and respectable Glasgow merchant, who had given

him a fairly good education and had got him a junior partnership in a young but rising firm in the city, dealing in hemp and flax. It was a splendid opening for young Anderson ; for although his share of the profits was at present exceedingly small, in the course of a few years they would probably be much enlarged, and he would be in receipt of a very good income.

There was nothing in the world to prevent his marrying Gretchen Rudenbach, if he felt so disposed. His old parents were homely, simple-hearted people, who had no other wish than for their David's happiness ; and they would have welcomed such a sweet gentle-mannered girl as she was with delight and affection. And David would have made her an excellent husband, but, alas for her ! there came between herself and this rough but honest red-bearded suitor the vision of a

tall, pale, gentlemanlike youth, with blue eyes and yellow locks, who met her in her daily walks, who gave her paternal advice coupled with fraternal sympathy, and who by occasionally pressing her hand sentimentally and looking at her tenderly, completely turned the head of the simple-natured little maiden.

One day, as the two were sauntering together down Wigmore Street, they came suddenly upon Wattie Ellison, who only nodded to them as he passed, but who looked back at them rather curiously after they had gone by.

‘What can Cis Travers be walking about with little Gretchen for, I wonder,’ he muttered to himself as he walked on; and Wattie came to the conclusion that Cis must be taken to task on this matter.

## CHAPTER XI.

## GRETCHEN GETS INTO TROUBLE.

WATTIE ELLISON'S rooms in the Temple do not, as it will be imagined, belong to himself. They are the property of a well-to-do bachelor friend, who seldom visits them, and who lends them to Wattie whenever he cares to come and occupy them. Wattie is one of those lucky men who always fall on their legs in these matters. He has friends by the score : friends with moors in Scotland, friends with fishing in Norway, friends with shooting in Norfolk, and friends to give him mounts in 'the shires ;' and one and all of these friends are ready and anxious

to welcome him and to give him of their best, whenever he may feel inclined to come to them.

And so, amongst others, he has of course a friend who has nice airy rooms, conveniently situated in the Temple, and who is only too delighted to place them at Wattie's disposal.

Wattie, who has been by way of reading for the bar ever since he came to man's estate, comes to these pleasant chambers occasionally, by fits and starts as it were, whenever a sudden fit of industry is upon him, takes possession of his friend's household gods, gives pleasantly-spoken orders with a smile on his handsome face to his friend's old man and woman, who are left in charge, and who are ready to work their old fingers to the bone in the service of such a winsome-mannered, liberal-handed young gentleman ; and taking down his friend's musty law-books

from their shelves, sets to work with a will, and burns the midnight oil in the study thereof.

And accordingly, when his utter rejection by Georgie Travers's father drove him in honour from the neighbourhood in which she lived, Wattie thought he would go up to London and toil at the law-books again. He had romantic ideas of remaining buried in hard study for several years, and then of bursting out suddenly into a Coleridge or a Cairns, when having realised a large fortune, and being raised to the top of his profession by his perseverance and his genius, he would go down triumphantly to Broadley, and claim Georgie for his wife.

He set to work very hard indeed ; for the first week he made himself almost ill by the ardour and energy which he threw into his labours. For the first week—after that he



began to find it rather monotonous. It occurred to him that, as he had a good deal of talent for painting, the fine arts might possibly open out a quicker road to fortune and to fame than the bar could do. At all events, the study would be pleasanter and more attractive in every way. Accordingly the law-books were replaced on their shelves, and the friend's rooms were quickly transformed into a studio. If, argued Wattie, he were suddenly to present to the world a striking and original picture, full of genius and talent, would not his fortune be as good as made? Why condemn himself to years of dry and uninteresting study when possibly a few months of much more congenial work might place him on 'the line' on the Royal Academy walls, and lead him at once to a comfortable income and to Georgie Travers? And, even supposing he

should not succeed and his picture be a failure, why then he could always go back to the law-books, for after all a few months more or less would not make much difference in the long run.

It was just at this stage of his proceedings that he stumbled across Cis Travers in Blandford Street.

Wattie Ellison was exceedingly cordial to Cis ; he had never taken very much notice of him when they were both down in the country together, but here up in London they met like old friends.

Georgie's brother was a person whom Wattie Ellison could not fail to find exceedingly interesting to him. When Cis sat in his friend's rooms writing to his sister, Wattie, without actually sending her any direct message, would suggest little allusions to himself and give bits of information or

make little skilful enquiries, which Cis would duly report as he wrote.

‘Wattie says he is going to do such and such things,’ or ‘Wattie has been asking me how your new mare goes, and what you have been doing this week,’ and so on ; and then, when Georgie’s answers came, you may be sure that all these little remarks were noticed and commented upon, and that the letter was as freely read by Wattie as by her brother.

Cis was fond of Georgie, for she had always been good to him and protected him from his father, and he was glad to do a good turn for her. Moreover, he became very fond of Wattie Ellison, and the two young men frequently spent their evenings chatting together in those pleasant Temple chambers, whilst Wattie, with a bit of charcoal, sketched out numberless rough designs for his great picture on a white board

upon an easel hard by, and then asked Cecil's advice upon them. Cecil invariably said of each that it was 'very nice,' and then Wattie shook his head and said it did not please him yet; rubbed it all out, and began it over again.

The same evening of the day when Wattie had met Cis and Gretchen walking together in Wigmore Street, the two young men were as usual sitting together over the fire in the Temple rooms, when Wattie said, rather suddenly—

'Do you intend playing Faust to our little friend Gretchen, Cis?'

'Eh, what? What on earth do you mean?' said Cis, getting rather red.

'Don't you think it rather a pity to walk about with the child? And I saw you buying those flowers for her the other day at Covent Garden. She is an innocent little

soul ; one wouldn't wish her to get into any trouble.'

'There's no question of any Faust, as far as I am concerned, I assure you,' said Cecil earnestly, leaning forward in his chair and staring into the fire. 'Why, you can't think so for one moment !'

'Well, I am glad of it ; at the same time she may get fonder of you than is good for her, poor little girl, and it may put ideas into her head and give her hopes.'

'Hopes? My dear Wattie, you don't imagine that Gretchen can expect me to marry her?' cried Cis, laughing.

'There's no knowing what a woman won't expect when a young man begins describing to her his views of marriage, as I heard you doing the other evening,' said Wattie.

'Oh, as to that, you know, one can't allow her to throw herself away upon a boor

like David Anderson, and I was giving her a little advice.'

'Why should she not marry Anderson? he would make her an excellent husband,' replied his friend.

'My dear Wattie, what a sin it would be! Such a pretty, refined, gentle little thing to be wasted on a great rough fellow like that!'

'It would be a very good match for her. I don't see where she would get a better,' persisted Wattie.

'Good heavens! how can you suggest such an outrageous combination? Beauty and the Beast would be nothing to it!' and Cis began impatiently walking about the room.

At this moment there was a slight scuffle outside the door, and in another instant the stern-visaged old woman who 'did for' Mr. Ellison broke in upon the *tête-à-tête* of the two friends with the information, which she

delivered with evident disapproval of such proceedings, that a young woman was wishing to see Mr. Travers.

She was almost immediately followed by a small figure, wrapped in a long black cloak, who, brushing past her into the room, fell at Cis Travers's feet in a passion of hysterical tears.

'Good heavens, Gretchen!' cried Cis. 'What on earth is the matter? what has happened? Here, Mrs. Stiles, go and fetch this young lady a glass of sherry.' And Wattie helped Cis to raise the sobbing girl and to place her on a chair.

'It is my father!' sobbed the girl. 'Oh, Mr. Travers, save me from him! He has beaten me so dreadfully, and he has turned me out of the house. Look here!' and she turned up her sleeve and showed to the two horrified young men a sight that made them both shudder.

Her arm, once round and white and

smooth, was covered with fearful bruises and bleeding wounds, and hung almost helplessly by her side.

‘And my back is worse!’

‘Good heavens, Gretchen, how dreadful!’ exclaimed Wattie Ellison in great dismay.

‘What was the reason of it; what made him so brutal to you?’

‘Alas! it was because I have lost my situation as music teacher. I am sure I did no wrong, did I, Mr. Travers, by walking with you? But Mrs. Wilkins, the lady whose little girls I was teaching, saw me with you to-day, and she saw me once before, she says; so she came this evening and told my father I was a bad girl, and that she would not have me to teach her children any more—and father was dreadfully angry, and beat me and then turned me out of doors, and oh, do help me! What shall I do?’

Cecil looked at his friend in blank dismay.



This was what his mistaken kindness had brought upon her.

‘Why on earth did you come here? had you no woman friend to go to?’ asked Wattie, almost angrily, of the weeping girl.

‘No, no one; and I knew Mr. Travers would take care of me, he is so kind to me. I haven’t a friend in the world but you,’ she added, looking up imploringly at Cecil.

‘What shall we do, Cecil? Shall we take her back to old Rudenbach?’ asked Wattie, in great perplexity.

‘Oh no, no, no!’ cried Gretchen imploringly, ‘I can never, never go back to him. If you knew how cruel he is, how often he beats me and kicks me, you would not want me to go back—I would rather beg my way in the streets. But, dear Mr. Travers, may I not stay here?’

She was evidently as innocent as a baby;

no idea of any wrong or impropriety in coming alone at ten o'clock at night to throw herself upon the mercy and charity of two young men ever for an instant crossed her mind. Cecil was kind to her, and she loved him devotedly, so in her trouble she had come straight to where she knew he was likely to be found, and, having found him, she trusted herself implicitly to his protection.

No two young men were ever placed in a more awkward predicament. Here was this girl suddenly thrown upon their hands, without a friend in the world but themselves, and common humanity compelled them to take care of her. Cecil, moreover, felt himself responsible for the whole situation. It was his fault that the poor child had got into such a dreadful scrape; it was his foolish sentimental flirtation which

had cost her her place and had made her brutal father turn her out of doors, and Cis felt in a perfect despair of misery and self-reproach as he reflected upon it.

Wattie Ellison forbore to reproach him. Fortunate it was that Mrs. Stiles was on the premises, and the two young men retired to consult with her over what was to be done.

Mrs. Stiles began by being exceedingly stiff and virtuous. She had never heard of such proceedings, she said, as a young woman coming alone to a gentleman's chambers in the middle of the night. She didn't know how she, Mrs. Stiles, a respectable woman, could mix herself up at all in such doings, and sundry other cutting remarks of the same nature—but when the whole of Gretchen's story had been circumstantially related to her, and when she had seen the poor girl's maimed and bruised condition,

feelings of humanity and charity awoke in her ancient bosom, and old Stiles, coming in at this juncture, proved a valuable ally, and suggested several useful and practical ideas.

Between the four it was settled that Mrs. Stiles should carry off Gretchen in a cab to the house of a cousin of her own—a certain Mrs. Blogg, who kept a small baker's shop in a street leading out of the Strand, and who, 'for a consideration,' which Cecil Travers eagerly offered to make as liberal as could be desired, would, she thought, take in Gretchen for a few days until it could be further decided what to do for her.

This idea was immediately carried out. Poor little Gretchen, much bewildered and rather reluctant, was carried off by the stern but by no means unkind old woman. Cis wanted to go with them; but Wattie, who had more sense and more knowledge of the

world, would not allow him to do so. Mrs. Blogg, a fat, shrewd-faced woman, with a sharp eye to the main chance, fingered the instalment of two sovereigns sent by Cis with greedy joy, and consented as a favour to take in the young woman.

And between them both the poor girl was put to bed.

But when Cis went the next morning to enquire after his *protégée* he found that Mrs. Blogg had in much alarm sent for the nearest doctor, as Gretchen had awakened in high fever and was quite light-headed.

For nearly a fortnight the poor child lay in raging fever and burning thirst, between life and death, and then her youth asserted itself and the disease left her, to live, but oh, so weak and pale, such a poor little shadow of her former self, as made even the heart of the hired nurse whom Cecil had

engaged to tend her, ache with pity at the sight of her.

Meanwhile our two friends had not been idle in her service. They had, in the first place, repaired to Blandford Street, there to find that the wretched old German music teacher had departed and utterly vanished, leaving no direction behind him nor clue as to where he was to be found.

‘And a good job, too!’ said his indignant landlady, ‘although he do owe me for five weeks’ rent, and for three pound ten, as he borrowed of me just the day before he went; but a more disrespectable drinking beast never came into an honest woman’s house; and I am glad he’s gone, even though I’ve lost the money. I am right down sorry for the poor young lady, that I am, and if I’d been at home he shouldn’t have turned her into the streets; but then I was out, and never knew nothing

about it till I got home an hour after, and found that furrin beast lyîng dead drunk on the landing.'

No more information being obtainable in this quarter, the two friends began seriously to discuss what should be done with poor Gretchen.

Cis Travers's funds were getting low, and he hardly knew how he should be able to go on supporting the girl if she was to be ill much longer.

Driven at last to desperation, he wrote to his father, and, vaguely stating that he had got into a little difficulty in which his honour was concerned, besought him to ask him no questions but to send him a cheque for fifty pounds at once.

The Squire was delighted with this letter from his son. It so happened that there had been a Newmarket meeting the previous

week, and the sport-loving old man settled it in his own mind at once that Cis had been lured into making some imprudent bets, for which this sudden and mysterious demand for money was to pay. Any iniquity connected with horses and horse-racing was pardonable in the old man's eyes. He was positively enchanted.

‘The boy is coming round at last!’ he said to himself, with a chuckle; ‘I shall make something of him yet; that sending him to London by himself was a fine idea!’

And when Georgie came into his room he said to her, with quite a beaming face—

‘Cis wants money; he has been getting into trouble; he has been to Newmarket and lost his money, the young rascal!’

‘To Newmarket!’ repeated Georgie in amazement. ‘Are you sure, papa?’ For Cis



had corresponded pretty regularly with his sister of late, and certainly there had been nothing in his letters to lead her to suppose that horse-racing had in any way formed part of his pleasures.

‘I tell you he has been to Newmarket,’ repeated the Squire doggedly, for he was determined to believe it, and he turned the key of his cash-box and took out his cheque-book, filled up a cheque for seventy pounds, and sat down and wrote a mild exordium to his son on the evils of betting if you backed the wrong horse, which letter considerably surprised and puzzled that young gentleman when he received it.

Georgie had her own opinions on the subject of what the money was wanted for, but she did not think it necessary to impart them to her father. She pulled old Chanticleer’s ear, and the ancient hound winked

his one eye gravely at her as much as to say  
'We know better, don't we?'

'So we do, old boy!' said Georgie in answer, half aloud, and left the Squire to his own delusions and to his letter.

But, although Cecil could make neither head nor tail of his father's letter, the meaning of his father's cheque was clear and very delightful, for with it he could do everything he wished for little Gretchen.

He and Wattie soon hit upon a plan for her. There was an old governess whom Wattie knew, who had once lived with the Ellisons, and who now had settled down in a little house in Pimlico, where she thankfully took in lodgers to eke out her small income.

This lady, Miss Pinkin by name, would, they soon found out, gladly receive Gretchen Rudenbach when she was well enough to

leave Mrs. Blogg's not very comfortable mansion. Cecil was to pay for her lodgings and for the hire of a cottage piano for her use, until she was well enough to begin her teaching again. Miss Pinkin's educational connection enabled her to ensure at least two or three young pupils for the girl at once, and in time, she would, they hoped, get many more.

Gretchen, on being consulted, thankfully and meekly acquiesced in anything and everything that Cis had settled for her, and when she was well enough to be moved she took up her abode in Miss Pinkin's upper floor rooms, and under that lady's care soon became strong enough to begin her work.

Cis took Wattie's advice, and went but very seldom to visit his little *protégée*. The poor child was very sad. She sat and

watched for him day after day at her window, and when day after day passed, and he did not come, she wept miserable tears in her loneliness. Now and then, once perhaps in a fortnight, he did come and see her, and then Gretchen became a transformed being; her pale face was suffused with a blush of delight as he entered, her heavy eyes became bright with happiness, and her gratitude and love for her young benefactor beamed out in every look and word.

But Cis was very prudent, and was determined not to put himself again in the wrong concerning her; only it did annoy him considerably to hear that David Anderson had tracked her to her new abode, and was constantly visiting her and repeatedly urging her to become his wife.

He might have made himself quite at

ease concerning this. Gretchen was in no danger of becoming Mrs. David Anderson.

‘I do not think about him,’ she would say to Miss Pinkin when that good lady urged her not to turn a deaf ear to so advantageous an offer.

‘But you do think about Mr. Travers, I am afraid, Gretchen,’ the ex-governess would say severely, ‘although he is far above you in station, and is not likely to think about you.’

And to this accusation Gretchen could give no answer whatever.

## CHAPTER XII.

## REJECTED AND LEFT.

WITH her feet on the fender, the last new novel on her lap, and her eyes fixed on the fire, Juliet Blair is sitting one evening in the twilight in the little morning-room to which she is accustomed to resort for her five o'clock tea.

It so happens, that an emissary from Madame Celeste in Bond Street, armed with cardboard boxes of every size and shape, has with much commotion arrived half-an-hour ago at the house, having come down from London by the afternoon express with an

entirely new selection of Parisian bonnets, hats, and head-dresses, for inspection.

Mrs. Blair, who would barter her soul away for a French bonnet, has retired with Ernestine to her bedroom to unpack and look over all these treasures, and it is possible that Colonel Fleming is not altogether unaware of these arrangements and of the superior attractions which retain the widow upstairs.

For he shortly afterwards steals into the morning-room and, drawing a chair in front of the fire, sits down by the side of his ward.

Juliet makes room for him with a smile, and then for several minutes neither of them speaks.

‘I have been doing a very unpleasant duty this afternoon,’ says Colonel Fleming at last.

‘Yes?’ from Juliet enquiringly.

‘I have sent off a letter that I have too long delayed writing. I have written to secure my return passage to India in the “Sultana,” which is advertised to sail in a fortnight.’

‘What!’ Juliet starts to her feet. ‘To India—are you mad! What have you done? The letters are not gone!’ and she makes a step to the door.

He puts out his hand to stop her. ‘I am afraid they are, Juliet; the bag was just going as I came in; but even if they were not, it could make no difference. I have quite made up my mind that it is high time I went back.’

‘Surely this is a very sudden determination you have come to,’ said Juliet, trying to speak calmly.

‘Not at all; I have been thinking of it



for some time,' he answered; 'only it was no use talking about it until I had made up my mind to go, and now the deed is done,' he added with a half sigh.

'I do not see that the mischief is in any way irremediable,' she answers, speaking quickly. 'It is easy to write to-morrow, and retract your letter of to-day. Colonel Fleming, I entreat you to think better of it; we cannot let you leave us like this, indeed we cannot!'

'You are very good,' he begins, rather formally; 'but I have not acted without due thought, I assure you.'

And then all her self-control forsakes her, and she bursts into a wail of despair, clasping her hands, entreatingly, 'Oh why, why should you go? are you not happy here?'

'Yes, I am happy—too happy, perhaps,'

answers Hugh gloomily; 'but one doesn't live for happiness, unfortunately. I have quite finished all that I came home to do for you, Juliet; and now I am only wasting my time and my life here.'

'But why need you ever go back? Why not throw up your Indian appointment, and stay at home?' she asks despairingly.

Colonel Fleming smiles. 'I don't quite see my way to that, Juliet. I am not likely to get anything else so good at home, or indeed anything at all, good or bad; all my interest is in India, and this appointment of mine is a very good one. You forget that I am a poor man. I should not have enough of my own to live like a gentleman in England.'

Juliet was leaning up against the mantel-

piece with her arms folded upon it, and her head bent down upon them. He could not see her face—the firelight flickered red and warm over her dusky head and her bowed figure ; something in the utter-despair of her attitude touched him strangely.

As he finished speaking, she raised herself abruptly and began walking rapidly up and down the room behind him.

‘ You must not go, you shall not go ! ’ she kept on saying aloud. He would not look round at her, perhaps because he could not trust himself to do so. He sat leaning forward on his chair and staring fixedly into the fire.

Then all at once she came and stood behind him ; her heart beat so that she could hardly stand ; her voice trembled so that she could scarcely speak ; her very hands, which she laid one on

each of his shoulders, shook as they rested there.

There was no light in the room but the firelight, and they could not see each other's faces.

'Hugh! don't go. Why should you go? Have I not enough for us both? Stay and share everything that I have—dear Hugh!'

And to her trembling words there succeeded an utter silence in the little room.

Why had she not worded it otherwise? why had she not said 'I love you; stay for my sake, because I cannot live without you.'

Then indeed he could hardly have withstood her; then indeed, for her sake as well as for his own, he must have taken her to his heart at once and for ever. But a some-

thing of maiden bashfulness and reserve, even in that moment of impulse, when in her despair she had let him see too much perchance of what was in her heart, had kept her back from the actual confession of her love.

And she had spoken of her money ! Ah, fatal, miserable mistake ! She had brought up before him the one thing that in his own mind stood as an insuperable barrier between them, the one thing that for honour's sake bade him hold back and leave her.

Rapidly through his mind there flashed the utter impossibility of what she had asked him to do—‘to stay and share all that was hers !’ how could he do so—how could he, her guardian, place himself in the utterly false position of her lover ?

Still he did not speak. Ah, will no good

angel prompt her to fall at his feet and to cry, 'I love you!'

The opportunity is gone. Hugh turns round, and takes her hands—gentle hands, that were still on his shoulders.

'My dear Juliet,' and his voice betrays some unwonted emotion, 'you are, I think, the most generous-minded woman I have ever met—but—'

'Ah, say no more! say no more!' she cries, wrenching away her hands from his grasp and burying her face in them.

'Do you not recollect, my child,' he says very gently and tenderly, 'do you not recollect that I am your guardian, and you my ward? In such a position, that I should accept any gift or loan of money from you is utterly impossible.'

He had wilfully misinterpreted her mean-

ing! With bitterest shame she saw that he misunderstood her purposely, that he spoke of her money where she had meant herself! Was ever woman subjected to such soul-degrading humiliation?

She, Juliet Blair the heiress, the owner of Sotherne, young, beautiful and talented, had made a free offer of herself to this man whom she had been weak enough to love. She had offered herself—and—had been rejected!

With flashing eyes and burning cheeks she turned upon him.

‘Say no more, pray, Colonel Fleming. I am truly sorry that I should have offended you by offering to lend you money. As you say, I should have remembered that between you and me such a transaction was impossible. Pray forgive me, and rest assured that I shall be very careful not to offend you

again by the repetition of such a proposition.'

Her voice was full of scorn, and as she ceased speaking she made him a sweeping bow and left the room ; and, hurrying upstairs into her own bedroom, she flung herself down upon the sofa and burst into a fit of passionate tears.

Bitter tears of anger and self-reproach over her own abased pride and mortified self-esteem ! What demon had prompted her to speak those miserable words ? Why had she committed the fatal, irretrievable error of wooing instead of waiting to be wooed ? And the worst of it was that it was all a mistake ! She had thought herself loved, and she had been awakened rudely to find herself scorned and rejected ! For that he had really misunderstood her she could not for one instant delude herself into



believing. In his pity and his compassion he had answered her about her money, feigning to ignore her true meaning—which, alas, she had all too plainly betrayed!

The position to any woman would have been a sufficiently painful one; but to Juliet Blair, with her proud spirit and independence of mind, such thoughts were absolute torture.

There was no untruth in the statement which she made to her maid, when that functionary entered her mistress's room to put out her dress for dinner, that she had such a frightful headache that she felt quite unequal to going downstairs again, and that she would have a cup of tea in her room and then go to bed.

But when this message was brought downstairs to the two who were awaiting her appearance to go in to dinner, Colonel

Fleming offered his arm in silence to the widow, and became very grave and silent indeed.

Not all Mrs. Blair's blandishments, backed up with an entirely new head-dress just come from town, could extract from her companion more than the most abstracted and absent monosyllables.

When it came to the mistress of the house being forced to keep to her room because of his presence—for it was thus that he interpreted her absence—Colonel Fleming felt that something must be done. Sotherne Court was no longer a fitting abode for himself.

After dinner was over, he studied Bradshaw attentively for some minutes, and then, going into the library, rang the bell for Higgs.

'Higgs, can I have the dog-cart to-

morrow morning to meet the eight o'clock train ?'

'Yes, certainly, sir.'

'Very well, then ; will you send James up to my room to pack up my things. I find that I am obliged to go up to town rather suddenly to-morrow.'

'Yes, sir—sorry you are obliged to go, sir ; we all hoped you would have stayed,' said the old man, lingering for a minute to poke the fire and sweep up the hearth. 'I'll send James at once, sir.'

And Higgs went his way to the back region, where, to the select community in the housekeeper's room, he gave it as his opinion that Miss Juliet had 'given the Colonel the sack ; and "more's the pity," says I, for a nicer, pleasanter-spoken gentleman than Colonel Fleming never stopped in the 'ouse !'

Colonel Fleming and James the footman

were busy packing up for the best part of the night.

‘He’ll never come back no more,’ said James to his superior, when at last he was dismissed; ‘he’s packed up every stick and every straw; he’s not coming back no more, Mr. Higgs.’

It did not behove Higgs to lower his dignity by confiding his views of the part which he supposed Miss Blair to have played in the sudden departure to one of the under servants. He contented himself with gruffly desiring James to ‘clean up that there mess, and to go to bed and to be quite sure he called the Colonel in plenty of time the next morning,’ an injunction which James, mindful of parting tips, was not at all likely to forget.

When Juliet awoke at eight o’clock the next morning, her maid stood by her bedside

with her cup of tea, and on the tray lay a small sealed note.

‘Colonel Fleming desired me to give you this note, miss, before he went.’

‘Before he went! is he gone?’

With what a sudden, faint sinking of the heart she asked the question! but how foolish! Of course he had only gone up to town for the day.

The maid, perfectly unconscious of her mistress’s agitation, said cheerfully that, yes, the Colonel was gone, and that she had heard Mr. Higgs say he had started in plenty of time, and was sure to have caught the train.

Juliet waited feverishly until the girl had left the room, and then tore open the note. It ran thus :

‘Forgive me for leaving you so suddenly without a word of farewell or of thanks for

all your hospitality and goodness towards me ; but you will not, I know, think me ungrateful. After all that has passed between us, I do not think I could have stayed any longer under your roof, and I have thought it best to leave you thus without the spoken farewell that must have been full of pain to us both. God bless and reward you, dear Juliet, for all your generosity and affection towards me. I can never forget either ; and, if ever you think of me in future years, do me at least the justice to believe that it is not inclination, but duty and honour alone which have told me to leave you.

‘I do not know where I shall stay in town, but I will write to you again before I leave England.’

Mrs. Blair and Ernestine were as yet deep in the mysteries of rouge and crimping-irons, when, preceded by a short sharp knock;

the door was flung open, and Juliet entered hurriedly, with an open letter in her hand.

‘My dearest Juliet!’ cried the widow, hastily flinging a dressing-cape over the small collection of pots, and phials, and camel’s-hair brushes that stood on the table near her,—‘how you startled me! What on earth is the matter?’

‘Did you know that Colonel Fleming was going away this morning?’ asks Juliet shortly.

‘Going away? No, certainly not; *has* he gone?’ answers Mrs. Blair, with an astonishment too real to be feigned.

‘Yes, I have just had this note from him to say he is gone; and I don’t know if you are aware of it, but he starts for India in a fortnight.’

‘No, indeed; I had no idea of it. So he is gone! very rude of him, I must say, to go

without wishing us good-bye.' Mrs. Blair has some difficulty in concealing the satisfaction she feels at this unexpected piece of news.

'Not rude, at all; he is suddenly called away—it is perfectly natural. Of course he could not wake us all up at so early an hour,' answers Juliet.

'What does he say? Let me see the letter,' says her stepmother, stretching out her hand for the note, but Juliet does not dream of giving it to her.

'There is nothing in it that would interest you,' she says, folding it up slowly and replacing it in its envelope. 'Besides, he says he will write again from town.'

'Ah, he will write again?'

'Yes, so he says.'

'Then perhaps, Juliet, you will leave me to finish my dressing, as there is nothing very



serious the matter, and it upsets my nerves so much to be obliged to talk so early in the morning. Go on with my hair, Ernestine.'

And Juliet goes.

Somehow that promise that he will write again prevents her from despairing.

That letter, she thinks, will in some way make up to her for all the suspense and uncertainty of the present. It is impossible that he can intend to leave her like that for years, perhaps indeed for ever. Vaguely, indistinctly as women see such things, she begins to see the duty and the honour by which he has said he considers himself bound, but, woman-like, she does not think very seriously of them. Has he not at the same time more than inferred that his inclination would lead him to stay with her? Do not such words mean that he loves her? And if so, then what need she fear?

What does a woman care for duty or for honour when set in the balance against love? Love in her mind outweighs everything ; give her love, and she laughs at every other earthly consideration. To Juliet, with her impulsive, enthusiastic mind, and her passionate temperament, it seemed impossible that so cold-blooded a thing as honour could in any man's mind win the day against love.

He would come back to her, she said to herself ; he would not be able to stay away ; a few days of waiting, and then he would come back to her even as he had come back before, sooner even than she had dared to hope for him.

She read his letter over and over again, she pressed it gladly to her heart and her lips, for she could not, possibly she would not, see in it a farewell.

And Hugh Fleming up in London is

pacing objectlessly up and down Piccadilly and Pall Mall, wondering what he shall say to her, and feeling more and more angry with himself for having left her, and more and more inclined to go back to her by the next train.

Curiously enough, he does not feel at all sure that Juliet does indeed love him. Even her last interview with him, when she had of her own accord offered him everything, had but partially opened his eyes. He knows her to be impulsive and impetuous, and generous to a fault. What more likely than that such a woman, fond of himself as she undoubtedly was, should in a moment of exaltation be carried away into offering more than she intended or realised?

Should he be right or justified in taking advantage of that moment of weakness?

Had he known how completely and

utterly the girl's heart was given over to him, he would certainly never have left her ; but he did not know it—he knew indeed that if he chose he might win her, but he did not understand that she was already won.

He wandered about the streets, trying to settle in his own mind how he should write to her—or whether, indeed, he should write to her at all ; and at last he decided that he would give himself one more chance of happiness.

He turned into the Club, and sat down and wrote to her.

He begged her to tell him truly if indeed what she had said to him had been the voice of her own heart—or merely an impulse of generosity ; he told her that he loved her passionately, entirely, devotedly, with a love that he never thought to feel again, after the death of his first love, and which she, Juliet

alone, had had power to waken in him. But he told her at the same time that every feeling of honour, of duty, and of delicacy bade him leave her ; that her money stood between them like a wall ; and that, moreover, his own peculiar position as her guardian made it almost a breach of trust to the dead that he should aspire to be her lover. One consideration alone, he said, could surmount these objections—the consideration of her happiness. If, indeed, she loved him so entirely that without him she could not live, nor be happy, then indeed, and then only, would he throw all these most weighty objections to the winds, and devote his whole existence to her. And in this case he entreated her to write to him at once and recall him to her side ; but if it was not so, if it was merely a grateful affection, a generous friendship, or even but a

brief-lived fancy, which had made her for one short hour imagine that she loved him—in that case he prayed her to put his letter into the fire, and to send him no answer whatever to it; he should know too well how to interpret her silence. He concluded his letter by naming to her the very latest date at which he could receive a letter from her in town before starting for Southampton, and by telling her that up to the very last minute he should still not despair, but hope to hear from her.

Even when he had directed and stamped this letter, Colonel Fleming did not immediately post it. He was still so doubtful about the wisdom and the propriety of writing to her at all that he walked about with the letter in his pocket the whole of the next day. It was only on the third day that, having, I

think, previously tossed up a sovereign, drawn lots from a number of blank slips of paper for one marked slip, and made use of sundry other most childish and undignified tricks of chance, in every one of which the luck came to the same decision, he finally determined to send the letter, and going out with it on purpose, dropped it himself into the pillar-post.

And then he waited—at first confidently and patiently—then, after a day or two, less confidently but still patiently—then with restless impatience, and finally, as the days slipped away one after the other, and the posts came in in regular succession, and brought him many others, but never the one letter he looked for—finally his waiting became despair.

The last day of his stay in England

dawned. He was obliged to go about his business to a few shops and to his banker's—but all day long he kept returning to his hotel to ask feverishly if there were no letters for him, to receive ever the same answer—none.

Then late in the afternoon he went to see a friend whom he could trust, and charged him solemnly to go the last thing at night, and again the first thing in the morning, to his hotel, after he had left, and if he found there any letter for him with a certain postmark, to telegraph to him on board the 'Sultana,' at the Southampton Docks, to stop his starting.

The friend promised faithfully—and then he could do nothing more, and he was obliged to go down to Southampton. To the last he would not give up hope; he



watched and watched all that night and all the next morning from the vessel's side, long after he had gone on board, for anything in the shape of a telegraph boy ; and he would not have his things taken into his cabin, nor settle even that he was going until the very last.

And then all at once the anchor was raised, and it was too late.

And as the good ship 'Sultana' steamed slowly over the grey waves of Southampton Water in the early morning, and stood out to sea in a light and favourable wind, Colonel Hugh Fleming beneath his breath cursed his native land, and Sotherne Court, and Juliet Blair, with deep and bitter curses.

'She does not know how to love—she could not stand the test. Her pride has ruined us both !'

And he turned his back on the white shores of the old country, and set his face fixedly and determinedly towards that far Eastern land to which he was bound.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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